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BERNA BOYLE.

LONDON :

ROBSON AND SONS, PRINTERS, PANCRAE ROAD, N.W

BERNA BOYLE.

A Love Story of the County Down.

BY

MRS. J. H. RIDDELL,

AUTHOR OF "GEORGE GEITH," "THE SENIOR PARTNER," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



LONDON:

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1884.

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BERNA BOYLE.

A Love Story of the County Down.

CHAPTER I.

BEECHFIELD was a house about three times as large as Ardilaw. Built long generations since, when materials were cheap and labour even cheaper, it possessed all the advantages and disadvantages belonging to the period at which it was erected.

Great rambling rooms, doors opening into unexpected cupboards, and smaller chambers, flung into the ground-plan, apparently out of mere wanton extravagance — narrow corridors, halls within halls, staircases where it seemed superfluous for stairs to be, low ceilings, small windows, yawning fireplaces, mantelpieces almost barbaric

in their pillared pomp and lavish expenditure of marble and carving, polished oak floors—a house in which a fortune might readily have been spent by some modern æsthete without producing any appreciable result; and yet that, with its dark old-fashioned furniture and bald simplicity, presented a certain appearance of proud stateliness many a modern mansion decorated in the highest style of latter-day art halts after in vain.

The house was literally hidden by trees. Though it stood on a slight hill, a view could only be obtained of even the upper windows when the leaves had fallen; yet from all the living-rooms glimpses were obtainable of soft green hills and white cottages, and a winding stream and verdant meadows, to say nothing of thousands of trees interlacing their branches, of foliage dancing in the sunshine or dripping in the rain—a place any man might have been proud of—a place Lyle Garnsey was proud of, though he permitted moss to cover the avenue, and the lawn to grow like a meadow, till the time came for the mowers to lay the grass into

swath, and gather into cock, after which time cattle were turned out to graze, and the broad expanse might have been supposed an ill-kept park, only it was not one.

Everywhere—on each fence, and pillar, and gate—the story of a straitened income was written.

Absolute poverty had never come as a visitor past the entrance-lodges; but Mr. Garnsey's income could by no means afford the expense of keeping such a residence in proper order. In the days of his youth he had spent his substance in wild and riotous living; and every effort he made in latter years to repair his fortunes resulted only in rendering the tale of disaster more complete.

The stories recited, with bated breath, beside humble hearths, over glowing turf fires, concerning the sins of his earlier manhood were, making allowance for some natural exaggeration, true enough. He had been very wicked in act; and in heart he was very wicked still. Remembered sins were pleasant to him, and he liked to talk to any one willing to listen about days of

evil-doing that could come no more. He married an heiress he disliked, for the sake of her wealth; and he broke the heart of the woman he loved. That page in his life could scarcely have been agreeable reading when, in the night-time, memory brought a lamp and the open book to his bedside, and bade him trace each mournful word which had been written in tears by one whose eyes could never more look at him with tender entreaty or agonised reproach. In every possible relation of life he had failed to do his duty; yet, so far as man knew, remorse did not often trouble his repose. He lamented that the railway mania should for him have resulted in loss instead of profit; he chafed because his means did not permit him to live most part of the year out of Ireland; he felt angry when he saw how business men were able to keep the great places they bought or built; but he failed to repent him of the wasted years spent in idleness and vice, and to prepare for the long, lonely journey to the land which is so very far off mortal eye cannot discern it, yet so near that scarcely

one second of our mortal time is needed to step from this world across its mysterious frontier.

Mr. Gorman Muir had not exaggerated facts when he spoke with such bitterness concerning the sort of conversation in which Mr. Garnsey delighted.

It was an offence to God and any decent man; but it had never offended Mr. Muir senior.

Quite the contrary. Mr. Garnsey's tenant revelled in the stories that gentleman recalled; the tainted atmosphere at Beechfield seemed full of nourishment to him; duels, and the causes which led to them; prize-fights, and those who witnessed them; the account of shameful orgies, and cynical anecdotes, the drift of which went to imply the venality of men and the frailty of women, found in Hewson Muir an auditor far too appreciative and comprehending. It was not so with Gorman. He hated the talk. Whatever was good in his nature revolted from the doctrines held by Mr. Garnsey, and he turned so dull an ear to discourses which had usually for their theme matters only demons might have been

supposed interested in, that at length the owner of Beechfield gave up trying to convert him, with the scoffing remark, "You're young yet, though you are old enough to know better. When you have seen something of the world you will think worse of it even than I do."

When a man comes of a good family, and has a fine property, and possesses enough money to keep the wolf from the door, it is not very easy to outrage public opinion, which usually inclines to smile on, rather than frown at, sinners in a respectable rank of life. Nevertheless, this was a feat Mr. Garnsey had managed to perform. One by one his equals dropped out of acquaintance with him. Fathers of families, whatever their own shortcomings might have been, did not care to associate on intimate terms with a man who would persist in insinuating they were even such as himself. Young men found his type of vice old-fashioned and wearisome; women—even those who wished to be married themselves, or who possessed daughters they wished to see settled—avoided him when possible, and when

not possible waited with dread the next innuendo it might please him to utter in those low, soft, trained notes, which added so much to the awfulness of his conversation. Had he roared his sinful speeches out like old Admiral O'Conegan, who always shouted as if he were trying to make himself heard in a high gale, they would have been robbed of half their terror.

His voice was so stealthy, that his utterances always, even if expected, seemed to come on the listener unawares. Possessed of refined tastes; a judge of painting and music; an ardent admirer of beauty in human beings, animals, and nature, with a cultured intellect, critical understanding, superior manners, a gentlemanly appearance, clear-cut features, and a cold heart, he seemed to Gorman Muir as good a representative of the Enemy of Mankind as he was ever likely to meet with in mortal form. He had never felt afraid of any man before; but he did feel afraid of Mr. Garnsey. Nevertheless, after making a detour which enabled him once again to pass by Clear Stream Cottage, he passed through the gates of

Beechfield ere turning his horse's head in the direction of Ardilaw.

When he paused by Clear Stream Cottage the night was fast darkening down, and, dismounting, he slipped in through the rustic gate and across the tiny bridge, and, from behind a little belt of shrubs, stood looking at the shuttered windows which hid from his sight the girl with whom he had fallen so violently in love.

She was playing; he could hear the tones of an old piano, which sounded to him like the music of the spheres. Cautiously he crept forward, till close on the narrow path which led round the end of the cottage; there he remained without moving, almost without breathing, listening to the harmony she was making. Suddenly she broke off, and, after a sad sweet modulation, softly struck a few chords, and began to sing.

"O, what a voice!" he thought, with rapture. He did not know the song, and he could not hear the words; but what he did know and hear sufficed to keep him happy company to Beechfield.

"Yes, my darling, it is all for your sweet

sake," he murmured, as he rode leisurely between the tall laurel hedges that made the approach to Beechfield seem like the entrance to some sylvan prison. The Garnseys had ever been proud of those wonderful laurels, quite twelve feet high, which hemmed in the avenue with thick leafy barriers; but to Gorman they always seemed terrible, excluding, as they did, light, and air, and view. His was a nature which never breathed quite freely except on the hill-top or a wild sea-shore. When the winter winds were howling, and the crested waves dashing madly over the rocks, he could have shouted like a boy with glad excitement. He was of the stuff men are made of who volunteer for forlorn hopes, and first mount the scaling ladder, and rush forward to meet death or victory. As an officer on active service he would have been the right thing in the right place; but he could scarcely be so considered, planted down in a quiet village, where even the echo of war's alarm was scarcely to be heard, situate within a few Irish miles of the largest manufacturing town in Ireland.

Once, with all the veins of his turbulent heart, he desired to enter the Army; but in those days his uncle was far too fond of him to contemplate the idea of separation. Since the rupture, he had often contemplated taking the Queen's shilling, shouldering his bayonet, and marching straight from the ranks to renown. But now all that was over. Success to him meant winning a smile from Berna Boyle; fame, making a home when he could call her all his own; happiness, toiling to provide her with such comfort and luxury as he could compass; heaven on earth, the knowledge nothing could part them but death, which, after all, could not part those for long who were sure to wait, each for the other, beside the river that encircles the golden land.

He had quite made up his mind as he rode into Belfast, and thought matters out while he let his horse walk leisurely along the lonely lanes he was forced to pass through in order to take Clear Stream Cottage on his way back; and when he at length sprang to the ground, and stood under the great portico which sheltered Beech-

field a little from raging northerly winds, he felt more than ever determined nothing should now divert him from his purpose, that he would follow the melody of that sweet voice till he caught the singer, and caged her beyond the possibility of flight.

“Has Mr. Garnsey finished dinner?” he asked the footman, who always felt distracted in his intercourse with Gorman between the remembrance that the gentleman was Mr. Muir’s son and the consciousness of several shillings and half-crowns having passed between them.

“The family have not set down to dinner yet, sir,” said William, in a creditable spirit of compromise. “The master—”

“Who is that?” asked the master himself, appearing in the hall at this juncture. “Muir, I declare ! Come in, man.”

“Not this evening, thank you, as you have not dined. I thought I should about catch you at dessert.”

“So you would, only I have been to a place on the other side of Mount Stewart, and only just

got back. However, that's all the better. Come along ; I'll hear no denial. Hot water shall be taken into my dressing-room. The fish will be up in five minutes, so you had better make haste. Never mind your horse ; Ward will see to him. You will find us in the drawing-room."

No man need have desired a more cordial welcome ; and though Gorman did not like his host, yet he must have been more or less than Irish had he remained insensible to the warmth of such a reception.

Besides, the house and its appointments were such as he had been accustomed to, and it would be idle to affirm that brotherly love or filial reverence had, so far, served to reconcile him to the domestic arrangements at Ardilaw. Ardent and impressionable as he was in all things, he argued such a greeting on the occasion of the first step he had as yet ventured towards fortune augured well for ultimate triumph.

With creditable rapidity he washed and brushed ; then, hurrying down-stairs, entered the drawing-room—an apartment so long it seemed

quite a journey from the door to the spacious hearth, on which glowed a fire of ruddy peat. There was no other light ; and a lady, starting up and holding out her hand, said,

“How do you do, Mr. Muir ? Don’t tumble over Bruce ; he’s lying stretched full length on that rug. I am so glad you have come. I’ll get you to look at poor Weenie’s leg after dinner. She got it broken, poor darling ; and I scarcely think Peter Doey has put the splints on right.”

“You are soon enlisted,” remarked Mr. Garnsey, who was standing with his back to the fire. “You have not had time to draw your breath before getting involved in the great dog question. For my own part, I wish not merely all their legs, but all their necks, were broken. Just look here ! Six of them ; no less. Enough to eat a man out of house and home— Dinner ! Please take my daughter, Muir. I will bring up the rear, and keep back as many of these raging fiends as possible.”

CHAPTER II.

OVER the dinner-table none but the most ordinary subjects were discussed. The state of parties in England, the doings of the Encumbered Estates Court, the prospects of the potato crop, the next year's great show in Hyde Park, the mildness of the season, prognostications as to whether there would be much hunting, speculations concerning the future of France, with occasional observations from Miss Garnsey bearing upon some piece of local gossip or the health of a favourite animal, made up the total of a conversation which was neither much better nor much worse than the usual run of talk in the family circle when slightly on its *p*'s and *q*'s.

In fond memory, perhaps, of a time when "dining" meant much to him in the way of wit and wine and company, Mr. Garnsey never failed to array himself in evening-dress before sitting

down to table ; and as, like a dutiful daughter, Miss Garnsey, often somewhat against her will, followed suit, Mr. Gorman had the blessing of beholding that young lady attired in a costume which was neither a riding-habit nor the severe and uncompromising apparel in which it was her custom to proceed on those errands of mercy that had elicited such admiring encomiums from Mr. Muir.

The dinner itself was very good. Let him stint in what he would without the house, Mr. Garnsey took excellent care there was no lack of comfort within it. He liked to live well, and every dish which came to table was admirably cooked and equally admirably served. No lack of warmth or light, either, in those spacious rooms, of glittering silver or sparkling glass. Gorman had dined there before more than once, and always with the feeling that he had walked back into the sphere from which so recently sentence of banishment was pronounced against him.

Though he did not like his host or care for Miss Garnsey, it seemed pleasant to float back for

even an evening amidst the well-remembered appointments, the soft-footed attendants, the dainty dishes, the culture, the refinement, the orderly service of old. It may seem ridiculous, but it is true, that he seemed to himself more worthy of Berna as he sat looking at the shaded lights and the snowy damask, and the delicate china and the massive plate, than when he was thrown among a family who ate their food in haste, and with almost as few accessories in the way of luxury as the Israelites on that night so greatly to be remembered.

He was happy—"fey" almost, to quote a well-known Scotch phrase. He talked gaily; he ate and drank with enjoyment; he laughed; he looked handsomer than ever; he conducted himself—so the butler confided to the footman—as "if he had been a gentleman born;" and assuredly, spite of the knowledge that his father was "just Hewson Muir of Ardilaw," those functionaries found it very difficult to remember he was not every whit as good as their master, who sat at the foot of his table, looking, so the notion occurred

to Gorman, as if he had been washed seven times in Jordan, and come up clean as a little child.

Usually there was a something exasperating to the young man between the darkness of Mr. Garnsey's inner nature and the freshness of his complexion; but on the evening in question it would have required more than a clear white brow and guileless blue-gray eyes to disturb his equanimity. Had he not a thousand pounds in the bank—an object in his life—the sound of Berna's voice in his ear? Who could be happier than Gorman Muir, seated in the flesh at Mr. Garnsey's table, and surrounded with everything calculated to gratify his senses, while his mind, off on a journey of its own, was standing in the semi-darkness of a summer's night, which enfolded himself and the dream-woman of his life in a mantle woven of mystery and silence?

Meals, no matter how long protracted, must end some time; and at length the cloth was drawn, and the dessert, which consisted of nothing specially rich or rare—pears and apples, grown in the Beechfield gardens, and almonds and raisins,

provided by the Beechfield family grocer—placed on the table. Before Mr. Garnsey stood two decanters and a carafe of water. Both servants withdrew—all waiting and chance of eavesdropping was at an end—and Gorman could at once have plunged into business had he chosen. But he did not choose. He and Miss Garnsey were engaged in the delightful occupation of seeing if they could discover any double almonds, when Mr. Garnsey asked,

“Why have you thrown us over in church, Muir? Was not our pew as good as that where you sat last Sunday, frying between the stove and the Rector?”

“Better, a great deal; but when Mr. Crummles took so much trouble to give me a whole pew to myself, I could not think of encroaching on your kindness any longer.”

“Cunning old fox! He likes to dot his few sheep about the landscape so as to produce as much effect as possible. I declare I have been to church when all the worshippers did not amount to six persons.”

“Why do we go to church at all?” asked Miss Garnsey, in a speculative sort of way, as she dreamily cracked another almond.

“Because we belong to the upper million, in a so-called Christian country,” replied Mr. Garnsey. “If our lot were cast in any other land we should no doubt follow the fashion there.”

“But you have convictions on the subject, I suppose,” suggested Gorman.

“What kind of convictions do you mean? Religious? Not I, my friend. I left all that sort of thing behind me long ago—as you will leave it in the days to come. We drop a lot of useless luggage by the way as we travel through life. What I shall never understand is the reason why we are weighted with so much at the beginning of our journey. The best years of our life are spent in disabusing our minds of any number of foolish fables and priestly legends and old women’s tales.”

“Slightly altering Miss Garnsey’s question, I wonder why *you* go to church?”

“Simply because it is well to conform to the

religious laws of a country as well as to its civil. On the whole, I find it less trouble to go with the stream than to fight against it—that is, in matters where my own conscience is not materially affected by doing so. If I were in Turkey, I should swear by the Prophet; if in Persia, worship the Sun; as I am in England—we will call Ireland England for once—I—”

“If you found yourself among cannibals—” interposed Gorman, who knew pretty well what was coming.

“I really don’t know whether I could manage human flesh; much would depend on how it was cooked. Fill your glass.”

Mr. Gorman Muir complied; Miss Garnsey cracked her last almond.

“I have not found a single double almond amongst them all,” she said, looking up disappointed.

“Console yourself, my daughter,” observed Mr. Garnsey; “you have made a bull. Mr. Muir, I know you came to say something to me. What is it?”

"I have at last received that money from my uncle."

"Indeed! That looks as if he were repenting him of the evil of his ways. Does he hold out any olive-leaf as a sign that the tempest of his fury has abated?"

"On the contrary, his solicitors, who enclose the draft, intimate Mr. Trevasson's desire that I shall, under no circumstances, communicate with him again."

"And what are you going to do?" asked Mr. Garnsey. His daughter had pushed aside her plate, upheaped with almond-shells, folded her hands on the table, and was listening intently. "Sell your horse, oil your gun, and take your passage for the Far West?"

"No; I mean to try to make some money here."

"How?"

"Well, thanks to you, I have made some already."

"But I thought you hated attending fairs and riding about to markets, and that you disliked,

beyond even those hardships, asking or accepting a fair price for your horses."

"That is quite true," agreed Gorman, a little confused; "but I might dislike the Far West more. I know the trouble I have to contend with here, and—"

"A case, in fact, of better the familiar fiend you know than the strange fiend you do not know. You may be right—I cannot say."

"At any rate, I want to stop here, and I do not want to go there."

Mr. Garnsey stole one swift glance at his daughter, even while he said,

"That ought to settle the matter—a man's own wishes are the best guides he can follow."

"I am not quite so sure of that," answered Gorman; "but, at all events, I mean to accept the guidance of mine."

Mr. Garnsey laughed. "Then you need no advice from me," he remarked. "If I can give you any help on your journey let me know."

"Thank you. I came to ask you to help me. Do you know of any man who thoroughly

understands horses, that I could engage to help me?"

"I am afraid I do not—yes, I do. You can have Peter. I will make you a present of Peter. He does not do an hour's work for me in a month, but he'll do your work. I shall be heartily glad to get rid of him. He and the maids are always at daggers drawn. They know he has a wife living somewhere, and that therefore his attentions are useless, not to say compromising. Yes, you shall have Peter."

Miss Garnsey laughed outright as her father spoke of the feud which raged between the too gallant Peter and the servants at Beechfield.

"Mrs. Murtrie—" she was beginning; but Mr. Garnsey cut ruthlessly across her speech.

"As a poacher," he said, "I can conscientiously recommend Peter; his knowledge of traps is exhaustive; as a setter of night lines he is unsurpassed. There is only one creature on earth wiser in such matters than Peter, and that is his lurcher 'Sniff.' There is something Satanic about that dog. I have seen the pair sitting in

the sun hatching some mischief; and I am sure Sniff knew exactly what was passing through Peter's mind. Now, Lydia, much as we appreciate your society, we will not detain you any longer from your four-footed friends. I am sure Weenie must have got her splints off; you had better go and see. Mr. Muir will help you to put them to rights presently."

"I shall be very glad of his assistance," answered Miss Garnsey; and, as Gorman held the door open for her, she looked up at him in a way he could scarcely misunderstand.

"You are not drinking any wine," observed Mr. Garnsey. "Will you have some whisky; there it is on the sideboard? Stop, I'll get it for you myself."

Gorman watched his host a little curiously. On the occasion of each visit the same ceremony was performed. From the servants' hall at Beechfield there had drifted a report throughout the country-side that Mr. Garnsey's favourite liquor was one brewed in an exceedingly hot region, the latitude and longitude of which is not accurately

known to geographers. Mr. Garnsey did not intrust the key of the cellar wherein that vintage was stowed away to his butler; and rumour delighted to say the master to whom he had sold himself took good care the bins were never empty. Once—undeterred by the fact of its fiery birth-place—the domestics managed to get a sip of the Satanic brew, which for ever after they described as “fearsome.”

“Yes, Peter is the very man for you,” said Mr. Garnsey, as he returned to the table, carrying a square decanter in one hand, and a bottle that was of no British manufacture in the other; “but you won’t have room to go in for many more horses at Ardilaw?”

“That was what I came to speak to you about principally. I want you to let me that farm of yours on the hill.”

“Do you mean Finney’s old place?”

“Where the house was burnt down.”

“Take my advice, and have nothing to do with it. You know the Finneys have sworn no man who ever sows seed there shall reap a harvest.”

"I am not afraid of the Finneys, whoever they may be."

"Have you spoken to your father about this?"

"No; I did not say anything till I knew if I could get the land."

"You can have the land; but talk the matter over with him before you decide to go on with the matter."

"Well, I will," said Gorman, disappointed.

"There are other farms on earth," said Mr. Garnsey.

"I know there are; but I had fixed my fancy on that."

"It is a pity. What, won't you take any whisky? Why, you are temperate. Then, perhaps, you would like to go and relieve my daughter's anxiety about 'Weenie'—only," he added, as Gorman twisted the handle of the door, "one word, Muir."

The young man came back, and stood with one hand resting on the table, waiting for what was to follow.

"*No flirtation*," said Mr. Garnsey.

"You may trust me, sir."

"I have other views for her. She will only have five thousand pounds fortune, and she must marry money."

"On my word of honour, Mr. Garnsey—"

"That is quite enough; remember, I trust you implicitly."

"You may, I assure you."

"Then go and see to those splints," said the owner of Beechfield, with a smile, which widened into a grin when the door closed behind Gorman. "If that does not put the notion into his head," he thought, "he is a greater simpleton than I take him for."

CHAPTER III.

WHEN Gorman Muir reached Ardilaw he found his father waiting for him outside the front gate.

“You’re late home?” he said, using the words rather in the form of a question than an assertion.

“Yes,” answered the younger man, getting off his horse and passing his arm through the bridle as he and his father paced up the hill, where the branches bent low over their heads, to the back entrance. “I have been to Beechfield. I wanted to ask Mr. Garnsey something, and he made me stay to dinner.”

“It’s just as well you weren’t back sooner. The house is quiet now ; what it hasn’t been all the afternoon. The clergy may talk about the poor demented creature that once upon a time lay among the graves ; but if they’d seen Bell awhile back they’d have known something about evil spirits taking possession of a woman supposed to

be in her right mind. She has been fairly raving. I never heard the like before in all my life."

"What was wrong with her?"

"According to her own account, nothing was right. I bore it till I could stand no more, and then I just took her by the shoulders and turned her out of the room. I observed the house was mine, and not hers; and that if I wanted a floor scrubbed I'd have it scrubbed, Monday or Tuesday, or any time in the week I pleased."

"O, she did not like the drawing-room being cleaned out," said Gorman, light suddenly dawning upon his mind. "I am so sorry I mentioned the matter. It was very stupid of me."

"Stupid! not a bit. I'm right glad to see the way it looks now. And, besides, it wasn't altogether the room set Bell's back up. That widow woman from Clear Stream Cottage was the beginning of the fray."

"What did she want?" asked the young man, interested at last. "I met her as I was going out."

“Ay, so she said. She came up, it seems, to ask if I wouldn’t let her have the butter and potatoes, and the other things she has, cheaper; and Bell took it into her head the woman had a notion of settling at Ardilaw as mistress. I wouldn’t like to say Bell was altogether wrong; for I’ve had a suspicion myself that if I asked her to be Mrs. Muir number four she mightn’t give me ‘No’ for an answer. I never did come across a greater fool; but for all that I don’t want to offend her. She has good people belonging to her; among them, Mr. Richard Vince, the great Belfast merchant, who might have been mayor long enough ago if he’d chosen. He married a Miss Carpenter, who came of a grand family; and they visit at all the best houses both in Antrim and Down. I’d never get a better tenant than Mrs. Boyle. If she hasn’t much sense, she has those related to her that have money; and she buys everything from me she wants that I have to sell. What is the use of angering her? That was all I asked Bell; but I declare to you, Gorman, the words were scarcely out of my mouth

before I got such a tongue-thrashing as I won't forget in a hurry. I could not edge in a syllable, so I left Bell talking, and started Ned on the drawing-room. She followed me there, and held on till, as I tell you, I turned her out. Then Sally began on me, and then they both set on Carline. You never heard anything like them, man, never. I was well-nigh distracted with the noise; but it's over now for the night. And one thing I've made up my mind to: if Bell can't behave herself she shall go—daughter or no daughter. It's out of the question to suppose she's to have everything her own way. Things have come to a fine pass when a sack or two of oats can't be put in the garret without her leave asked and granted."

"I am vexed, though, to have been the cause of so much trouble. If I had not spoken about that room—"

"She'd have found something else to rail over. She's had a grudge against me ever since I wouldn't let the cottage to Sam Dopp. A likely thing, indeed, to suppose I'd have his tathery-headed

children making wreck and ruin of the place Mr. Orr turned into a garden of Eden, in a manner of speaking. It's strange, isn't it, Bell can't stand anything that's only for ornament? I have nothing to say against her cleanliness, except that sometimes I wish she would leave the place dirty; but I can't understand why it is she does so hate beauty of all sorts. It it was only in women, the matter would not get over me; but, upon my conscience, I believe if she had her will, the world would be one big ploughed field, with all the trees cut down for firewood. As for flowers—" at which point Mr. Muir, finding language inadequate to express the fair Isabel's contempt for primroses and violets, was fain to take refuge in silence.

"She is certainly a remarkable young woman," said Gorman—"a little trying sometimes; but then we cannot expect to find all the virtues."

"If we did in Bell we'd be disappointed," answered the farmer; "but we've said all we need say about her. And so Lyle Garnsey would take no refusal, but made you stop for dinner?"

"Yes, he was very kind indeed."

"He has taken a wonderful notion to you."

"I am sure I don't know why, for there are not many subjects on which we think in common."

"I don't see that has much to do with it. If I mind right, you mentioned about needing to ask him something; was he able to tell you what you wanted to know?"

"Yes, and I should like to talk to you about it, if you are not too tired. I'll only give Larry a rub down, and be after you in ten minutes."

"What would you rub Larry down for, when Ned is in the kitchen waiting to take him from you? There is nothing to hinder you grooming your horse, I allow, if there's nobody else to do it for you; but as long as I pay wages there's no call for me to clean horses myself or let my son clean them."

"I don't mind what I do in that way," answered Gorman, very truly.

"Well, you're not going to do it," said Mr. Muir. "Just put Larry's bridle over the hook, and I'll send Ned out; you are past the common

active," he added, half in reproach, half in pleasure, as his son ran into the house to summon Ned for himself.

"Come along," added Mr. Muir, following Gorman and laying a hand on his arm, "and see the fine clearance we've made. Molly hasn't spared elbow-grease on the boards, I can tell you. Look!" and with pardonable pride Mr. Muir threw open the door of that room where stately ladies had received grand company, and wrought rare and costly needlework, and sang the old songs which were new in their day, and loved and sorrowed, and known heartaches and heart-burnings, just the same as any nineteenth-century belle.

Gorman uttered an exclamation of pleasure as he saw the changed look of the apartment. It was clean as Molly's willing hands could make floor and paint. She had swept, and scrubbed, and washed, and dusted. An old oaken sofa-table, brought from the first-floor landing and polished with beeswax till it shone in the leaping firelight, stood beside the hearth, flanked by a couple of antique straight-backed chairs that would

have been precious in the sight of any collector; turf glowed in the wide grate, and a beech billet was laid on the top to give brightness to the flame. A brass kettle was singing on the hob, while materials for punch were placed upon the table.

“You’ll have a glass for once, Gorman?” said his father, “just to warm you and hansom the new room. I’m well pleased myself at the look of it, and I hope you’ll spend many a happy and prosperous hour in it;” having delivered himself of which sentiment, while pouring some whisky into a tumbler, Mr. Muir at one gulp swallowed that whisky neat—solemnly, and as if he regarded the whole proceeding in the light of a necessary religious ceremony.

“My head won’t stand raw spirits,” said Gorman, laughing, as he mixed himself a very modest allowance of Bushmills.

“Well, well, just as you like,” answered Mr. Muir, in a spirit of rare tolerance; for, indeed, he did not like to hear his son’s head would not stand anything. “Pull up your chair and have a good air of the fire. It’s chilly to-night. I got

a feeling of cold while I stood out by waiting for you."

"I am grieved to have been so late. It was foolish of me to go round by Beechfield, perhaps ; but—"

"Foolish ?—not a bit of it. You don't think I mind your stopping out, do you ? I'm only proud to see my son so much thought and made of."

"As I was riding into Belfast to-day," said Gorman, "I began to lay out my plans—do a little castle-building, in fact," added the young man ; "and when I was on my way back I thought I would take Beechfield on the road, and ask Mr. Garnsey if he knew of any man I could hire to help me. You see, once I go into horse-dealing, as I mean to go in, I shall want some one who can devote the whole of his time to my work."

"That's quite right," said Mr. Muir ; "but you might have asked me first."

"So I would, only I was sure you did not know anybody likely to suit me."

"And does Mr. Garnsey ?"

“He says so—Peter Doey.”

“Peter!” exclaimed Mr. Muir; “Peter! I never thought he’d want to leave Beechfield.”

“Mr. Garnsey seems to want him to leave. There’s some trouble about the servants, I think.”

Mr. Muir laughed. “I shouldn’t have thought Lyle Garnsey would have minded what the servants did. There’s another reason, we may be very sure. However, I wouldn’t say but Peter might be just what you want. There’s not a craftier old rascal in the length and breadth of Down. You’ll need to keep a sharp eye on him. There’s this much, though: if he cheats you himself, he’ll let nobody else cheat you; and as for horses—well, he just couldn’t know more about them.”

“So far, then, we are right enough. Then there was another thing. You know that farm up the hill, which marches with your land?”

“Yes—Finney’s.”

“I asked Mr. Garnsey if he would let it to me. It’s exactly the sort of place I want.”

“And what answer did Mr. Garnsey make?”

“He advised me not to take it.”

"I don't know who would want to take it."

"Well, but the quality of the land is nothing to me. It grows some sort of grass, and is a splendid stretch of ground for young things to gallop over, and learn to take their leaps, and—"

"Get houghed, or their tails cut off, or their tongues slit."

"No one would try that game twice with me."

"Wouldn't they? Much you know what they'd do—not stand nice about lodging a bullet in your own head, for that matter."

"I should rather like the excitement of such a business," said Gorman.

"It is a sort of excitement a little of goes a long way," answered Mr. Muir. "For my own part, I hope I'll never have any more of that kind of diversion."

"Why, have you ever had any of it?"

"Have I? Haven't I? Did you never hear tell of the county Down burnings?"

"I do not recollect that I ever did."

"Save us! I thought the English were bad enough; but it is worse to meet a man that was

born in Ireland who knows nothing about the destruction of property that went on just round about where we're sitting, no further back than two or three years. Why, there wasn't a night the sky wasn't red with flames. Over on the other side of the Lough the people used to watch for the fires beginning. Not a man in all these parts but lost something. Haystacks and corn-ricks went like smoke, and at last they fell to the houses; so that when we did go to bed, which wasn't often, we lay down in terror of our lives. At Clear Stream and Kilmoon they put lighted turf in the thatch; but thatch won't burn, you know, without a lot of trouble."

"But do you mean to say that the incendiaries were never caught?"

"Never; not one of them."

"What were you all about, then?"

"Watching our property, and distrusting every man his neighbour. I've watched my ricks myself, and so has many another farmer; and I swear to you while I've been at one end of the haggard the other has been set alight. No; we

never got sight even of who did the mischief. If we hadn't known fire couldn't have come without hands to bring it, we'd have thought the tinder had fallen straight down from heaven."

"But, surely, such criminals might have been detected!"

"That's what everybody said till they tried the experiment. *I* said so; and heaps more beside me. We watched—we laid traps—we were quite prepared to shoot anybody down—but we never set eyes on anybody to shoot."

"It was most extraordinary. I never heard of such a thing."

"Nor anybody else. And I'll tell you another remarkable circumstance. We found out there was a car with five people on it passed the end of this lane every night; and we held a meeting, with closed doors, at Beechfield, where there wasn't a man present we did not believe true—not a man but had suffered loss. We decided to stop the car, and take the five on our own responsibility. When it got near the time a lot of us, who were told off for the purpose, went and laid

an ambush along the Newtonards Road. *That night the car did not pass, and it never passed again.* What we all wanted to know—and what we want to know yet—is who told that we meant to take the law into our own hands?”

Gorman only shook his head in reply. He was puzzled, but not convinced.

“What put a stop to the business at last?” he inquired.

“That’s what we never knew, either; to be sure, there wasn’t much left to burn in the way of hay and straw, and it’s not so easy as anybody might think to fire a house from outside. The way the whole thing ended was this. A big reward had been out a good while without anything coming of it, when, one morning, we heard two girls, that lived with their father near Ballymacarrett, had shot some fellow they thought meant to fire their stacks. They were alone in the house, their father being away; and they fired through a window. They were afraid to go out; but they watched, and saw the man laid on a heap of stones by his comrades till a car drove

up, when he was taken away, as they imagined, dead."

"They were plucky girls," remarked Gorman.

"Faith, you'll say that when you hear the finish of the story. You may be sure there was a to-do, the whole country-side running to see the place, and the blood that had soaked down among the paving-stones, and the Belfast papers full of the affair, and the body being searched for, and all suchlike. There was a talk and excitement. I heard some people in England sent the girls a silver teapot, and there were those thought the Queen would want to see them. If they had been Queens themselves, more couldn't have been made of them than was made, while the police were working up the only clue they had—a cloth cap, that had fallen off the man's head while they were carrying him to the heap of stones."

"I wish I had seen those girls," said Gorman; "are they living in Ballymacarrett now?"

"No. What do you suppose the upshot of the whole matter was?"

“ They got the reward, I suppose, and a good deal more ; and married well, and—”

“ I'll tell you. The blood on the stones was analysed, and found to be bullock's blood. My ladies had got it off a butcher in Hercules Street, and they had bought the cap, and they had never shot anybody ; and they were glad enough to go to America.”

“ Good heavens ! And the burnings ?”

“ O, they stopped at once.”

“ Then do you suppose—”

“ I can't suppose ; the whole thing beats me fairly. Two girls, even with the help of their father, couldn't have set a whole country-side in flames.”

“ I am not so sure of that,” remarked young Mr. Muir ; “ it is wonderful what even one woman can do, if she lays her mind to it.”

“ You are right, if it is any manner of harm,” said his father.

CHAPTER IV.

“PETER,” said Mr. Garnsey, “I am going to hand you over to a new master.”

The abruptness of this address might have surprised some persons; but it was difficult to surprise Mr. Doey. When a man selects a garden-roller for his seat on a raw winter's day, and calmly continues sitting and smoking while addressed by a superior, he can scarcely be judged by the rules supposed to govern ordinary mortals.

The roller was moss-covered, like the walks; but at meal-times, as well as on many other occasions, Mr. Peter Doey did his best to remove this reproach by obligingly transferring a portion of the green to his own garments.

He was a short, wiry fellow, with a dried-up face curiously wrinkled, small bright eyes, and thin black hair just turning gray. He looked as

if he had lived all his life in an atmosphere of peat smoke, and never been washed since he was born. Sniff lay beside him, head between his paws, one ear cocked, ready for any evil errand on which it might please Peter to despatch him. Mr. Garnsey, clean shaven, fresh from his morning bath, both hands plunged in the pockets of a trim pea-jacket, stood looking at dog and man, waiting for Peter's comment upon his information.

"There is one comfort," said that worthy, taking the pipe out of his mouth so as to speak with greater ease, "I couldn't have a worse master than yourself."

"Surely that is scarcely grateful," remonstrated the master so addressed.

"Grateful! What would I be grateful for? Worked harder nor any beast, and for less nor a beast's wages. Mornin', noon, and night, it is just 'Peter, Peter, Peter,' till I'm fairly tired and sick of the sound of my own name. First it's you 'Do this and do the other,' and 'Why the —— don't you attend to what I tell you?'

Then it's your daughter wanting me to cut her dog's ears, or clip her mare, or brush her habit that's splashed with as many sorts of mud as there's soils in the county. Then while I'm choking myself over that, Mrs. Murtrie starts me off for something she's forgotten to order out of the town, and I declare to my conscience, what with the butler, 'Peter, go there;' and the footman, 'Give this a shake;' and the coachman, 'Lend a hand here;' and the housemaid, 'Peter dear, mind you don't forget that calico for me;' and the cook, 'What a good-for-nothing fellow you are, and not a lemon in the house!' I don't know most times where Peter is at all, whether in Belfast, or down the village, or at Beechfield, jogging along to Newtonards, or breaking my neck 'lepping' hedges and ditches to catch the train."

"Poor Peter!" said Mr. Garnsey, "console yourself. For the future you will have only one master to serve, and only one thing to do, and that is look after horses."

"And what master is it you want me to serve

now? Mind, I haven't said I'm going to him, whoever he may be. For the bite and sup a man has to make a snatch at in haste and sorrow, you may drive him about as if he was no more nor a beast of burden; but you can't sell him, like a slave. This is a free country to starve in, at any rate; and I don't know but I'd as soon starve as lead the life I've been leading here."

"I am sorry you have been so miserable with me; but you certainly will have a better berth where you are going than I could ever find you."

"I'm not so sure that I'm going anywhere."

"But I am. I have promised you to my friend, and—"

"If he's a friend of yours, Mr. Garnsey, maybe if I agreed to take his money I'd be jumping out of the frying-pan into the fire. Why can't you tell me the man's name at once—that is, always supposing he's not a woman?"

"It is young Mr. Muir."

"D'ye mean Gorman? What does he want with me?"

“To look after his horses.”

“He has only got one.”

“But he means to keep a lot. He is going to make his fortune out of them—if he can.”

“What would hinder him making his fortune? You mind there is *One* takes care of his own; and if ever a coin had the image and superscription of Satan graven on it, that coin’s Gorman Muir.”

“I don’t see much sign of the cloven hoof about him,” said Mr. Garnsey, surprised at Peter’s manner.

Apparently Mr. Doey considered this remark unworthy of reply, for he put his pipe again in his mouth, and went on smoking, till the owner of Beechfield, a little nettled, perhaps, at a knowledge of iniquity wider than his own, observed,

“Let Mr. Gorman Muir be what he will, he knows a good horse when he sees him.”

“And he knows a pretty girl when he sees her,” capped Peter, with a malicious grin.

“A man must be stone-blind who cannot do that.”

“And *he’s* not blind,” said Peter, with conviction.

There ensued a moment’s silence, during the course of which Peter puffed away meditatively, and Mr. Garnsey, with the toe of his boot, stirred the short grass on which Sniff was lying.

“You’d best let him alone, master,” advised Mr. Doey; “he’s got a way of snapping sometimes you wouldn’t like, if you felt his teeth meet through the leather.”

Mr. Garnsey took the hint, and desisted. “Then I may tell young Muir,” he began, “that you’ll go to him?”

“’Deed, you may tell him no such thing,” answered Peter. “I have thrown myself away once, and before I engage again I’ll want to know a whole heap of things I was so foolish as to make no inquiry about here. I’m no flyabout—one place to-day and another to-morrow; and before I stir one step I must know what I’m to do, and how I’m to be paid. Besides, where’s the man going to keep his horses? If it’s at Ardilaw, he must search about for some other nor me to look

after them. It would need a bigger stable even than any Mr. Cleery owns for me and Hewson Muir to put up in together."

"He is going to rent Finney's land from me."

"Is he tired of his life?"

"It looks as if he were. I don't want harm to come to him, but he is set on taking the farm; and, after all, some one must run the risk. The place can't lie idle for ever."

Mr. Doey knocked the ashes out of his pipe, laid it carefully on the roller, and then, locking his hands together, sat considering the position.

"What shall I tell Mr. Gorman Muir you'll do?" Mr. Garnsey asked at length; while Sniff, opening one eye, looked slyly up at the speaker, as though listening with appreciative interest to his conversation.

"I don't know myself, master; so how would I tell you? If the young man thinks he has need of me, he had best come and say so. There's many a thing would have to be settled between us. It's a come-down in the world from Beechfield to Finney's Farm—never to speak of the perils I

might, like Saint Paul, have to encounter over yonder. He'd be bound to consider all that in the wages, for I have no intention of leaving here unless I better myself. The last man took Finney's Farm was burned out of house and home; and it's always against a hired servant to be connected with anybody gets into trouble or makes a disturbance in the world. Now if young Gorman was killed, I might have to give evidence, and—"

"Decide the matter between you, and be damned," said Mr. Garnsey, waxing impatient.

"Well, well, master, if that should come to pass we'll all be in the same boiling," answered Peter, as he slowly gathered himself up from his chilly seat, and limped off with the gait of a cripple towards the stable-yard, followed by Sniff.

He had not, however, gone a dozen paces before he turned and retraced his steps.

"Mr. Garnsey, sir," he began.

"What is it now?" asked that gentleman.

"I wish when you see young Muir you would give him a hint to say nothing of what is in his mind about needing the benefit of my help and

taking advantage of my experience. Maybe I might never leave Beechfield. Anyhow, there is no use giving the whole country-side words to set to music." Having uttered which profound remark, Mr. Doey really took his departure.

CHAPTER V.

WHEN a man has set his heart on any course, he is always able to give fifty excellent reasons why he should pursue it; but he usually omits to state the true cause, which lies at the bottom of the whole matter. Mr. Gorman Muir proved no exception to this rule. His talk as the days went by ran on the cheapness and convenience and general desirability of Finney's Farm; but he never said that a girl's face was keeping him in Ireland, chained to one particular piece of country lying between Newtownards and Belfast.

As Mr. Garnsey so truly remarked, there were other farms to be let in Down; and, as Gorman himself could have told all concerned, there were more counties than Down in Ireland, and other countries in the world besides that of his birth, to one of which he would immediately have set about transporting himself and his fortunes had he

never seen Berna Boyle. For the first time in his life he was in love. At his age, and with his temperament, it would be folly to say he had never before been taken captive by a pair of bright eyes: he had fancied, and flirted, and kissed, and lain awake at night, and written poetry by day, and believed his heart would break if sweet Kathleen or merry Norah refused to smile on his suit; but in proportion as the maids grew kinder his affection cooled. All through his boy and earlier manhood he was perpetually apostrophising the wrong woman. Did he write a sonnet to Mary, he immediately found out he ought to have inscribed it to Aileen; after chanting the praises of Aileen he was sure to discover his affinity in Lucy. Many a girl wept bitter tears over the young vagabond's inconstancy before he was twenty-one; but as he grew older there were those who, though they made no moan, suffered deeper pain, because with all their arts they could win no glance of special tenderness from those deep brown eyes that, while seeming to make love to all the better part of creation, took very good

care to bestow no look of individual interest on any single fair.

He had been courted, flattered, smiled on, sung to, danced with, till at two-and-twenty he was fairly tired of being run after. He felt weary of girls and women, of mothers and daughters. He longed for some wider sphere of action; he wanted to go out and see the world. He wished to be an officer; to cut the Mount Michael leading-strings, which always dragged him back to Kilkenny just when he most wanted to take a run on from Paris to Madrid, and reminded him he was staying too long in London, though he might have been enjoying the pleasures of that capital only for a month. Mr. Trevasson was at once too indulgent and too exacting. Had Gorman been his son, and the Mount Michael estates strictly entailed, he could not have brought the young fellow up with a greater certainty that one day every tenant would call him master; and yet the moment he dared to exercise the smallest free will he was pulled sharply back into inaction and dependence. As a boy, the length of his tether

had sufficed ; but when Gorman grew to manhood, the knowledge that though he might proceed a certain distance, he could not go further afield, chafed his restless spirit, and caused him to long with tenfold intensity to break bounds.

It was about the same time that he began to grow weary of bewitching amazons and timid sirens. Amongst the ladies of his acquaintance there were many beautiful, amiable, accomplished, in all respects desirable ; but Gorman had known them for years, and was heartily tired of their attractions. Such indifference to the fair sex is, at that age and with such temperaments, more common than women like to imagine possible. He had his dream-love, the joint offspring of poetry and fantasy ; but he believed, wherever the fleshly tabernacle containing that divine conception resided, it was not in the county Kilkenny. Far away in some Eastern land, after wild adventure and long travel, he might—in the evening, or the morning, or the noontide of some happy day—meet his Rebekah, passing fair to look upon ; but he was in no hurry to do so. She

would still be waiting for him, pitcher on her shoulder, or sheep following her to the well; while he wandered through strange lands and unaccustomed scenes, to find his dream-woman thousands of miles from the little emerald isle, modestly stated by one of her poets to be “in the ring of the world—the most precious stone.”

Meantime Mr. Trevasson wished him to marry an heiress who was certainly neither a Rebekah nor a Rachel. Gorman, however, wanted to choose his own heiress when, in the fulness of time, it should become necessary for him to choose at all; and over this difference of opinion there ensued the first real quarrel between uncle and nephew. It did not last long; for the lady, whose own preferences had never been consulted, chose a clergyman for husband, and Mr. Trevasson felt glad enough to find an excuse for again taking into favour the kinsman he loved. Time went by; still Gorman hunted, and fished, and shot, and danced, and grew more and more idle, and, if the truth must be told, more and more accustomed to the useless life he led. Satan, we are

told, always finds work for the unemployed ; and it may be that Satan now and then did find a not unwilling servant in the gentleman no one doubted would inherit Mount Michael.

By and by Rumour began to busy herself about Mr. Gorman Muir. Whatever his sins, they were, perhaps, painted blacker than facts warranted. Gossip always takes sides against the criminal. She has long constituted herself public prosecutor on behalf of society, and if the young man had been white as snow—which he was not—she would soon have contrived to bespatter him with mud.

It was then Miss Dora Autrim, who had recently arrived in the neighbourhood, spoke up in Gorman's behalf. *She* would never believe ill of Mr. Trevasson's nephew, she said. He *must* be good and honourable. It was wicked for people to talk as they did about him. And she took him into great favour, and would gladly have accepted the task of changing this leopard's spots if the young man would have let her.

He, however, preferred to keep his spots as

they were ; he would have none of Miss Autrim's kind attentions. He had never liked, and at last he grew to hate, her light ringlets, her great blue eyes, her baby face, her rosebud mouth, her pearly teeth, her soft caressing ways.

When Mr. Muir said his son had played his cards badly, he was quite right. Gorman let her read the whole of his antipathy, and only laughed when, with a little mocking curtsy, she remarked, " We shall see," and left the room.

He did see. She was an unscrupulous player, and in her hand she held those court cards, youth and beauty, that count for so much in the game of life. It was her turn to laugh when she entered Mount Michael as Mr. Trevasson's wife ; her day of triumph when, three months later, Gorman passed her in the hall on his way out—a dethroned heir, a disgraced man. Full was his heart of bitterness while he rode down the long avenue, never once looking back, with his face sternly set towards that world he had now perfect liberty to conquer if he could.

No one ever probably began a fresh career with

a firmer determination to keep out of love and mischief than Gorman Muir; and yet a chance encounter in the ghostly twilight, a few words spoken by a girl he did not know, a glimpse of an upturned face he could scarcely see, sufficed to break down all the barriers he had erected with such care—to change his whole destiny, and influence every day of his future life.

He might not have stayed one hour at Ardilaw after he received his thousand pounds, but for the thought of Berna, who would not speak to or look at him; who seemed to hold it an offence that his eyes should rest on her; who would not let the skirt of her dress touch him as she passed in church.

It was this led him on. Had she been different, he might have forgotten her as he had forgotten others. Had he met her in Kilkenny, been formally introduced, talked to her, laughed with her, she never could have stamped her image on his heart as was the case. In the common round of daily life he kept ever following one gliding phantom, Berna Boyle. He did not once

mention her name; but he listened with avidity to the slightest word dropped about her. For the first time in his memory love made him shy—love caused him to be fearful—love seemed to ennoble him. In every previous affair he had thought but of self—all his care was now for her. She was poor—early and late he would work to make money. She had come down in the world—it should be his glory to give her back all she once possessed, and more. Of her daily life—what she did, thought, felt—he knew absolutely nothing. But this ignorance, so far from damping his romantic musings, only increased their ardour. He was chained by no fetters of fact, hampered by no rules of conventionality. Through dreamland he roved at will, still following a flitting figure, which never once turned its head to look behind. He had found his Rebekah. He had met his Rachel. But the acts of gracious kindness, the smiles of bashful tenderness, still only gleamed amid the mists of a dim vague distance.

As yet his love was all fancy—and shall we say folly (since the world has still to learn in-

tuition is the truest wisdom)? But yet it could not but be considered as founded on a rock, because even in its most shadowy recesses it held no thought of turning, had conceived no idea of wrong—it was grand, loyal, hopeful, true, and modest. Whether with man or woman, the best fruits of the soul are accounted well-nigh valueless, and timidly offered on the shrine of love as things of no account. Such as he was—and faults balanced by many virtues held at times high revelry in Gorman Muir's nature—he had fallen head over ears in love with Berna Boyle. To him, her low estate seemed next to nothing—to her, the knowledge that he was Mr. Muir's son raised a barrier she imagined years could not raze or circumstances destroy. To Berna it all appeared most horrible. Unwittingly, her fancy had strayed out to meet this stranger, who ought never to be anything to a Boyle of Boyle Court. For a short space—while she did not know who he was, during the time she only saw a horse and his rider—her errant fancy went out to meet the hero of romance so many girls create for them-

selves from the unlikeliest materials; but when she knew him as Gorman Muir, Berna steeled her young heart against him. What! she her father's daughter, and think of such a man as that—a man not merely low, but wicked; a man who had the assurance to imagine her the same as himself, and conceive a girl who came of such a stock, who boasted a lineage like her own, could answer look for look and take step with step in that awful way that might lead her at last to acknowledge Hewson Muir of Ardilaw for father-in-law!

And there was nothing further from Gorman's notion than any idea of asking his dainty, stately love to cast in her lot with his people. For six-and-twenty years he had not lived among those who accounted themselves of the bluest of blue blood for nothing. If his darling could have associated with his people, he would not have thought so highly of her as he did.

No; when once she was won, he would take her away. He did not know where; but far from Ardilaw, at all events. Some day, some happy

day, he should be able to tell her all that was in his mind. Looking down on the stretch of open sea that bursts upon the view when the hill beyond Ardilaw is climbed, and the height of Craigantlet reached, or peeping from the green arch formed by interlacing trees at the sight of Carrickfergus Lough to be obtained as the cross-road from Dundonald nears Holywood, and the county Antrim seems close enough to touch, and the water, though three or four miles in width, appears no broader than a tiny lake, and any one might think he could throw a pebble on the deck of the English steamer hugging the Down shore—Gorman determined to speak to Berna Boyle of his dead mother, and Clonmellin, and Mount Michael, and show her how, Ardilaw notwithstanding, he had the right to count himself one of the select hundred thousand, the lower million in Ireland were at that period, when birth went for much and money for little, for ever toiling after in vain.

“ You’ll be for building yourself a fine house one of these days, up on Finney’s Farm, sorr,”

said Peter, after various preliminaries had been settled between him and his prospective master entirely to that worthy's mind.

"What should I build a house on Finney's Farm for?" asked Mr. Gorman Muir, surprised.

"You needn't be a bit feared," observed the man reassuringly. "There's just a pair left in the country would do a thing to hinder you; and, with the Lord's help, we'll tackle them—ay, and beat them, too—that is to say, if you'll be guided by Peter."

"But I don't want to build a house. What do you imagine I should do with a house up there?"

"Live in it with your wife, when you bring her home."

Gorman was so surprised he could not help changing countenance. Nevertheless he looked straight into Mr. Doey's shrewd, wrinkled face, while he said,

"When I marry—if ever I do—I hope I shall be able to take my wife to a different sort of place altogether from Finney's Farm."

Peter drew down his brows and screwed up his eyes, and, fairly puzzled, thought for a moment before he asked,

“It’s the truth you’re speaking, Mr. Gorman, and not a lie?”

“The truth, of course. Why should you doubt me?”

“Well, that’s queer, too,” commented Peter. And for many a long day he never touched on so delicate a subject again.

CHAPTER VI.

IT was a dreary afternoon in December, as dreary as afternoon could be. All the morning a high warm wind prevailed, sweeping dull masses of gray clouds across a sky unrelieved by even a gleam of sunshine ; and as the day wore on a slight drizzle of rain began to fall, which at length, without the slightest warning, turned in a moment to a wild storm of hail. Berna, who had been on a mission connected with eggs and poultry to Mrs. Gribben, was met by this storm as she came down the hill from Craigantlet. Before one could have clapped hands, her umbrella was turned inside out, her shawl almost torn off her back, her skirt twisted round her ankles, her bonnet on her neck, and her face tingling with the smart of the hailstones, which stung like the cut of a whip. Almost blinded, she instinctively made for the nearest shelter, the garden hedge of Ardilaw, which bounded one

side of the road, about twenty paces from the spot where the storm burst upon her.

Breathless and dishevelled, she squeezed herself between a brick pillar and the privet, and panting, waited for the first violence of the tempest to exhaust itself ere repairing damages. She had not stood there more than a few seconds before a man jumped over the opposite ditch, and, holding his dripping hat on with one hand, crossed the road.

“Why, Miss Boyle, is that you?” said Mr. Muir, for it was he; “don’t stand there. Come in, come in;” and he opened the garden-gate, which was fastened with a chain and padlock, as he spoke.

“Thank you, but I think the storm will soon blow over,” answered Berna, who had never got into cordial relations with their landlord.

“You may as well wait in the house as here,” he returned, still holding the gate open. “It’s an awful day. I wish Gorman had chosen any other to ride across to Comber. He’ll be fairly drenched.”

"I will get home as fast as I can," said Berna, ignoring the Gorman question altogether, and making a futile attempt to pull her bonnet into position.

"That you won't," declared Mr. Muir, who for the first time in their short acquaintance realised the full extent of the girl's beauty, as she stood with her hair tossed about her face, and a brilliant wind-blown colour in her cheeks, looking, in that leafy shelter, as he often afterwards said, "like a picture." "How could ever I meet your mother again, if I let you stop out here to be chilled to your marrow? Come along. You're keeping me out in the wet, too; and Bell 'll find a cloak to wrap round you as you go back."

Without actual discourtesy, Berna felt she could not longer refuse to enter Ardilaw. "You are very kind," she said, and stepped once more out into the weather. In a trice Mr. Muir had shut and locked the gate, and with a caution to "keep close to the hedge," started running towards the house in advance of Berna, from

whom he thus managed to keep some of the violence of the storm. It was awful. The hail pelted on their heads; the wind swirled and eddied, as if anxious to tear them limb from limb; twigs, dead leaves, and straw were flying in all directions; as they crossed the yard the very dog only looked at them shivering, refusing to leave the shelter of his kennel in order to bark at Berna.

In the kitchen there was not a soul. Berna stood for a minute within the porch, to let the wet drip off her garments.

“Come in, come in,” repeated Mr. Muir. “What are you waiting for? Never mind the flags. I don’t know where my daughters are; but step this way, and I’ll soon find out. Mind you don’t trip, it’s dark here.” And so he led the way to the hall, where, pushing open the door of that room Gorman had furnished, he was about to ask Berna to sit down till he summoned his daughters, when he perceived, with astonishment, that the whole family was there assembled.

A bright fire blazed on the hearth, in front of

which stood Miss Garnsey, a light whip in her hand, the skirt of her riding-habit thrown over her arm, a huge dog stretched at her feet, talking volubly to Mr. Gorman Muir. The two Misses Muir, and Carline, now Mrs. Cragland, were listening with all their ears to the young lady's discourse, which she broke off when Mr. Muir entered, in order to greet that worthy with enthusiasm.

"You did not expect to see me, I know," she said, holding out her hand, and shaking his as though he had been her dearest friend. "My mare got a stone in her shoe, and I turned in here to ask one of your men to take it out, when Mr. Gorman appeared on the scene. He made me come in. Lucky, wasn't it? If I'd been out now, I should have got soaked to the skin. But you are wet through, Mr. Muir, and so are you," she added, addressing Berna, who, having tried at sight of the group collected round Miss Garnsey to effect her escape, was held by the farmer as though she had been his prisoner.

"We're not quite so bad as all that comes to,

but we're bad enough," answered Mr. Muir. "Carline, help Miss Boyle off with her shawl; and, Bell, you hang up her bonnet to dry. Where did you start up from, Gorman? I thought you'd be at Comber by this time."

"I heard Neely was not at home, so I did not go on," answered Gorman, who had risen when he saw Berna, and now offered her his chair.

"I am afraid you have got sadly wet," he said, taking her shawl from Carline.

"O no!" she replied. "Thank you, I would rather not sit so near the fire;" and she retreated a little from the hearth.

"You ought to change everything you have on, at once," said Miss Garnsey, speaking with great decision. "You will catch your death of cold; and I'm sure you are not strong, you don't look so."

"I am very strong," answered Berna, smiling in spite of herself; "and I must get home as soon as possible. Mamma will be uneasy about me."

"Well, there's one comfort," retorted Miss Garnsey; "nobody will be uneasy about me. It

would drive me wild to have any person fretting and fuming if I were not back to a minute. Papa began that sort of thing, but I soon put a stop to it;" and she turned to Mr. Muir for approval; who, however, remarked he thought it best young girls should be bound by some sort of rule.

"If you were my daughter," he added gallantly, "I think I'd want to know you were safe and sound; and when you get a husband, I'm very sure he'll not be content to have you out of his sight for half an hour together."

"Really, Mr. Muir, you are a most delightful person," exclaimed Miss Garnsey; "you will make me quite vain. I assure you I am not accustomed to receive such charming compliments."

"Ah, that's what you tell *us*!" said Mr. Muir; "but I'll never believe such a change has taken place in the world since my time. When I was a young man, there was nothing came readier off my tongue than a quiet word of that sort to a pretty girl. I wish I was young again, for your sake."

"And I wish you were young again, for my own," declared Miss Garnsey, patting the dog with her foot.

"Carline, perhaps Miss Garnsey would take a cup of tea," suggested Gorman, cutting across the conversation, in dread, perhaps, of where it might lead.

"I should like one very much indeed," said Miss Garnsey; "and, Miss Muir, as we came through the kitchen I saw some delicious potato-cakes baking; mightn't we have some? I never get any at home. Mrs. Murtrie won't make them. Don't you like potato-cake, Miss Boyle?"

Miss Boyle answered that she did, but without enthusiasm. "I do hope," she said, in a low tone to Carline, who hovered near her, "the shower will soon be over; mamma does get so uneasy."

"Make yourself content, miss," interposed Mr. Muir, answering Berna's looks rather than her words; "your mamma won't say a word to you. Once the weather moderates I'll drive you home myself. Good people are scarce, and pretty

people are scarcer, and I'll not risk the loss of one that's both good and pretty."

"You ought to get up and make a curtsy for that," exclaimed Miss Garnsey, at the same time stealing a glance towards Gorman, to see how he took his father's remark; but Gorman's face was inscrutable.

When Miss Garnsey was of the company, it proved no easy matter to edge in a word, even sideways. Mr. Muir only, of all present, attempted to do so, and the consequence proved he and she had the conversational ball to themselves, tossing it to and fro, with a good deal of boldness on the farmer's part, while Berna sat on thorns, wishing she had never entered the house and that she were well out of it.

Tea appeared. Whatever her feelings at having to permit a meal so utterly out of season, Miss Muir was forced to control them. She had declined Miss Garnsey's proffered help; she had negatived that young lady's request to be allowed to butter the cakes; grimly she had "set out" the best china, and produced a silver service which

once belonged to that sainted woman, Mrs. Muir number two ; and now with stoical resignation she sat down to pour out tea for their landlord's daughter, who compelled Berna to take a cup, and could not, to quote Miss Muir subsequently, "sit like a Christian," but walked about the room eating and drinking as she paced from fire to window, talking, laughing, and enjoying herself thoroughly.

"So you've got a piano," she said, pausing before a small instrument Gorman had hired. "Who plays?" and she looked around at the ladies of the Muir household.

"None of us," answered Carline. "It is Gorman."

"You ! Why, I never knew you could play."

"I only strum," answered the young man. "Won't you try the instrument, Miss Garnsey?"

"I ? Good gracious, no ! I detest playing. I suffered enough while learning my notes to make me hate it for ever."

"Miss Boyle, you sing, I know—"

"How do you know?" asked Miss Garnsey sharply.

"She looks as if she did," answered Gorman, somewhat confused.

"Do give us a song," entreated Mr. Muir; a request which was so earnestly repeated by his daughter that Berna, to avoid argument, did as she was asked.

"Well, that's beyond the common," said Mr. Muir, when the last note died away. "I didn't think sounds like that could come out of a woman's throat. The lark's no better than you. But I'm afraid we've tired you; all the colour has gone from your face. Come here by the fire and rest. Gorman 'll, maybe, sing you a song himself now."

Berna did not beg Gorman to do so, but Miss Garnsey made up for her omission. The evening was darkening down; the old room was lighted only by the flickering firelight; without, the wind howled around the house; within, there was silence, broken only by the sound of Gorman's voice as it rose and fell, trembled with passionate

tenderness, and died away in sorrowful appeal. "Adelaïde" was the song he selected. More absurd words were probably never set to music, but that did not signify. As Berna listened she could not see the leaping blaze for a mist of tears.

"Hail or shine, I think I'll have to make the best of my way home now," said Miss Garnsey, when the song was finished.

"And Gorman will go with you," suggested Mr. Muir.

"I will walk beside you with pleasure," remarked Gorman, certainly with no tone of pleasure in his voice; "but I can't ride, my horse has cast a shoe."

"Thank you; but I need no escort except Bruce," answered Miss Garnsey, a little shortly. "I will get away now;" and then she bade good-evening all round and, accompanied by Gorman and her dog, walked off to the stable-yard.

"I wonder, now, what brought her here to-day?" marvelled Mr. Muir, not without a certain touch of pride in his voice.

"Do you? I don't," retorted Miss Bell.

“Anybody with half an eye could see she came after Gorman. Well, she need have money, for I am sure she’s no beauty; but money’s all the men think of.”

“Man or woman’s not much without it,” said Mr. Muir sententiously. “Sit still, sit still, Miss Boyle. If you must go, I’ll have the gig brought round; you sha’n’t walk one foot of the way to Clear Stream this night.”

“It’s not fit for anybody to be out in such weather that can stop at home,” observed Miss Muir, with some acrimony.

“Indeed, I am very sorry I came out,” answered Berna, who could not fail to see the drift of Bell’s remark. “I feel quite distressed at the idea of giving your father so much trouble.”

“You needn’t be fretting yourself about that,” was the reply. “He never minds trouble, if it is for strangers.” Upon the whole, it was not easy to converse with Miss Muir.

Berna stood looking into the twilight while Mr. Muir was absent; talking sometimes softly to Carline, sometimes adventuring a remark to

the second Miss Muir, and even occasionally essaying a word to the redoubtable Bell.

"I am very, very much obliged to you all," said Berna, as Carline wrapped the shawl close around her, with an action that was almost a timid embrace.

"O, you've no call to be that," returned Bell ambiguously.

"Now, if you're ready," suggested Mr. Muir, putting his head into the room; "I don't want to hurry you, but the horse doesn't like standing."

"Where's Gorman?" asked Carline.

"We can't be waiting on Gorman," Mr. Muir replied. "Likely as not he's half-way to Beechfield by this."

But Gorman was not half-way to Beechfield. As they passed out of the house they found him standing beside the gig.

"There is no need for you to turn out," he said to his father. "I can drive Miss Boyle home."

CHAPTER VII.

“WE had better go round by the road,” said Mr. Gorman Muir to his companion, as he drove slowly out of Ardilaw. “The cross lane will be very heavy after all the rain we have had.”

“Do you think so?” answered Berna faintly. She had shrunk into the very smallest possible space, and found it difficult to prevent her teeth chattering as loudly as the spokes of Mr. Muir’s old gig rattled.

“Yes; it will be in a shocking condition,” returned Gorman, and then he paused. He did not know what to say next. Precious minutes were flying, and he felt tongue-tied. With any other girl he would have found plenty to talk about. He had driven girls home before that night, and could not remember that the conversational well ever dried up; but now it seemed frozen. Ah! the moonlights, and the twilights, and the starlights that all came back to memory

as he peered forward into the darkness ! Evenings on the water ; evenings wandering among flowers, while the sound of music floated across the warm summer air ; evenings when he looked at down-cast blushing faces and upturned laughing eyes, and words were not lacking, or, for that matter, looks either ; and now—he felt stricken dumb.

But faint heart, as we know, never won fair lady ; added to which it was manifestly impossible two persons could drive steadily through the night and never exchange a syllable. Accordingly, though the voice in which he spoke sounded strange to his ears, Gorman began,

“I am glad, Miss Boyle, to have at last an opportunity of apologising for frightening you so much the first time we met. The matter has been a weight on my conscience from that evening till this hour.”

“I was more startled than frightened, I think,” Berna answered.

“Yet you have not walked there since,” he said, and unconsciously he leaned a little towards her, and his voice took a tenderer tone.

"Well, it is scarcely the season," suggested Berna, who at that moment would have welcomed any accident that had taken her out of the gig.

"That is true," he answered. "When the fine weather comes again, I trust you will not let the memory of my unfortunate intrusion prevent your taking what I should imagine must be a pleasant stroll."

"I do not know where we may be when the fine weather comes again," said the girl, ignoring the implied question concerning the delights of wandering through Mr. Muir's meadow.

"Why, are you thinking of moving? I imagined you were settled here."

"Mamma does not like the country. She often speaks of moving into some town."

"Belfast?"

"No; not Belfast. Bangor, possibly. She has friends there; she has none here."

"But you, Miss Boyle, you would not wish to leave Clear Stream?"

"I think I should like to go to Bangor," she answered. "I love the sea."

He did not know what to say after that, it seemed a complete rout. True, Bangor was not far away, but it could never be the same thing as Dundonald. If she went there, who could predict what might happen? Once again he sat dumb; this time from misery, not shyness.

"I was in hopes that you would have remained at Clear Stream," he ventured at last; "it is a pretty little cottage."

"Yes; but it is lonely for mamma."

"And for you?"

"I do not mind about that. All places are much the same to me—now—"

"Ah!" he said; "I do not think place has much to do with happiness. I, for instance—" then, "Were you ever in the county Kilkenny, Miss Boyle?"

"No. Our county was Mayo."

"I do not know Mayo. I once spent a month in Galway, near Lough Cong, with some people called Vassaleur. Perhaps you may have heard of them."

"Yes; from the Dowager—I mean old Mrs.

Boyle. They were friends of hers." She could have added that the families once hoped to be closely allied. A daughter of the house, now a middle-aged spinster, might possibly have been her father's wife, but for that unfortunate meeting with Milly Vince, which made such a wreck of his after existence.

"Old Mr. Vassaleur was shot one day as he was driving up his own avenue," said Gorman, beating the coverts of his mind in vain for some clever or original remark.

"Yes," agreed Berna, to whom every detail of the murder had been familiar for years.

"That is what I shall be one day, I expect."

"Why?" For the first time Berna's voice had a touch of interest.

"Because I have taken Finney's Farm—"

"Who is Finney?"

"He was a man who held under the Ardilaws; he had been evicted before Mr. Garnsey bought the land, and when the Ardilaws let the farm to a fresh tenant the house was burnt down about his ears. After Mr. Garnsey got possession, he

let the land to some one, who put a fresh roof on the house, and ran up the party walls, and made the place habitable once more. No sooner was that done than the fresh tenant was burnt out, narrowly escaping with his life. For a time Mr. Garnsey cropped the ground himself, but the potatoes were dug out of the drills, and the corn cut green. It has been lying fallow for years, and now I am going to try my luck."

"But is not that foolish? Some harm may come to you."

"If harm does come, who is there to care? In the world, I suppose, there is not a more lonely man than myself."

"You have your father and your sisters," said Berna, taking refuge in one of those statements which are safe because purely conventional.

Gorman laughed, a little bitterly. "When a man has been away for six-and-twenty years from all his relations, he finds not merely that they can do very well without him, but that he can do very well without them."

"It is sad to hear any one say so."

“Why should it be? We were all meant to leave home, to form fresh ties, to make new interests for ourselves. I have not made any fresh ties yet, and therefore it signifies little what becomes of me.”

There could be no answer to this. Berna felt strongly any fresh ties Mr. Gorman Muir chose to form ought to be nothing to her; whilst the young man, conscious that matters were at last progressing a little, waited painfully for what might happen next. A word, a single word of sympathy, and he would have told her there was one for whose sake he might be induced to count life valuable—one he held as high above him as the stars of heaven, one he scarcely dared to think of as ever likely to smile on him; but Berna did not speak that word.

Instinct, which is often so much safer a guide than experience, taught her she stood on the very verge of dangerous ground.

While they were talking, Gorman had let the horse slacken his pace almost to a walk. “At this rate,” thought Berna, “it will be an hour

before we get to Clear Stream ;” and what might such a man not say even in a few minutes ?

“ O Mr. Muir,” she exclaimed, “ would you mind driving a little quicker ? It is very late, and mamma will be so uneasy.”

Gorman started as if from a dream, and gave the horse a couple of slashing cuts with the whip, which caused him to spring forward and then settle into a long, stretching trot, which made the gig rock and the loose spokes shake as though the crazy vehicle were going to pieces.

“ Don’t beat the poor thing,” entreated Berna ; “ perhaps he is very tired. I ought not to have stopped so long at Ardilaw, or allowed your father to send me home.”

“ Perhaps you think you ought to have got wet through, and tramped home along lanes which are now a foot deep in mud,” said Gorman ironically, taking the animal, which was momentarily increasing its speed, well in hand. “ No, Miss Boyle,” he went on, in a different tone ; “ had we let you do anything of the sort, we ought to have been shot ; and as for the horse, he is not tired ;

he has not been out of the stable for two days. I wonder, now, if you think I am cruel; if you do, you are mistaken. I would not wilfully hurt anything. You believe me? I should like to hear you say you believe that, at any rate."

"I should be very sorry to believe otherwise; but—"

"You think I was too rough with the poor old fellow. Perhaps I was, and I am sorry for it; but if you saw him following me about at Ardilaw, and trying to put his nose into my pockets for bread or carrots, I am sure you would see he understands me. One may seem unkind sometimes, and yet never mean to be so."

If he expected her to make any comment on this general statement, Mr. Gorman Muir was mistaken.

"I had a pony once," Berna said, in a didactic sort of way, "that would eat anything—bread, apples, walnuts, plums—which it could steal. Such a funny little pony!" and Berna's voice faltered. She wondered where that pony was at the moment.

“You ride, then?” exclaimed Gorman. “O, I wish you would let me train a horse for you. I have a lovely young thing coming home next week that would just suit you. Dark brown, with black legs; though full of spirit, gentle as a lamb; a mouth soft as a lady’s hand; you might ride him with a silken thread. Do let me train him for you—I should feel so proud and happy.”

“Thank you, Mr. Muir,” said Berna, who felt really touched by his eager earnestness. “It is very kind of you; but I never rode except with papa; and I do not suppose I shall ever ride again. We are very poor now, you know,” she added, with that unconscious pride which so often apes humility; “and we are never likely to be anything else.”

“I hope you are greatly mistaken,” Gorman began; but he could add no more, for at that moment the horse turned into the lane where Clear Stream Cottage was situated, and finding its head was set towards Ardilaw, improved its pace so suddenly, that Gorman found he had much ado to pull him up at the rustic gate, where

some one, whose head was enveloped in a shawl, stood waiting.

“Who is that?” asked Mrs. Boyle—for it was, indeed, the widow—as the conveyance stopped.

“It is I—Berna—mamma,” answered the girl, springing down into the mud before Gorman could select a dry spot for her to descend. “I hope you have not been uneasy about me.”

“Much you care about my uneasiness, miss,” retorted Mrs. Boyle. “Keeping me out here till this time of night, catching my death of cold, and breaking my heart thinking you had got murdered or robbed, and were lying in some ditch, only to be brought home stiff and stark, as your father was. Ah! it’s well seen which parent you take after—not a bit of thought for anybody but yourself. And now, will you please to say where you’ve been all the day long, and who it is that is standing there?”

“Only Gorman Muir, Mrs. Boyle,” explained that young man, coming forward and taking off his hat. “My father saw Miss Boyle sheltering

at Ardilaw; and, as he would not hear of her walking home, I took the liberty of driving her back myself. I hope and trust she will be none the worse for being out in such dreadful weather."

"O Mr. Muir," exclaimed the widow, "I never can return you sufficient thanks! I am sure I feel most grateful both to you and your father. If I don't die of standing here with nothing but this shawl about my head—and, indeed, it was always considered I would go into a decline on account of the beautiful colour in my cheeks—I'll remember your kindness to the last day of my life. There's not many would have given themselves so much trouble about a young slip of a girl who hasn't as much sense as would carry a snipe across a bog. Come inside, Mr. Muir. Don't be stopping out there making a stranger of yourself—and you such a friend and all. What's that you say?—the horse won't stand? Well, well, more's the pity; and not a stable, or even a byre, about the place to bid you put him up in. It's very good of you, I'm sure,

to tell me take care of myself, and not be staying in the night air; but as I've stopped so long fretting myself to death about Berna, a minute or two more can't make any difference. Hadn't she best get in beside the fire? Yes, that she had. She'll be all for taking care of herself. I am sure if I gave way as she does I might be ordering my coffin every week. You see!—she's gone with hardly good-night to you. It is a trial to a woman when she sees her child growing up as different from herself as darkness is from light. Well, if you *must* go, Mr. Gorman, though I'd have been more than pleased if you could have come in and had an air of the fire."

"You are kindness itself," returned the young man; "but I really must be making the best of my way back to Ardilaw. If, however, you would allow me to call to-morrow to inquire how you and Miss Boyle are after this evening's exposure, I should esteem it a great favour."

"Come, and welcome," answered the widow. "I'm sure in this wilderness—footsore and weary, the Jews never found a worse—it's a comfort to

find anybody to tell one's troubles to. And you needn't put yourself out if Berna sits like a marble statue and never opens her lips. She means no harm. It's just her way; and a bad way, too, as I've told her, over and over again."

"Good-night, dear Mrs. Boyle. You really must not stand here any longer," and Gorman pressed the widow's outstretched hand warmly in his own.

But for the friendly intervention of the rustic gate Mrs. Boyle might have seized so excellent an opportunity for fainting in the young man's arms. As it was, she only said,

"Come as often as ever you like," adding to herself the comforting assurance, "He's breaking his heart for the want of me." And, as she tripped back along the path, she tossed her little head coquettishly at the thought, "He is just like the rest of them."

CHAPTER VIII.

"I SUPPOSE," said Mr. Muir, to his son next morning, shortly after breakfast, "you'll be for going to Beechfield to-day, and seeing if Miss Garnsey's any the worse for yesterday's rain."

"She was not out in it ; but I meant to ride over and inquire how she got home."

"That's right. Civility'll never hurt you ; and I'm sure she'll be right well pleased."

Gorman made no direct answer to these statements ; his mind was full of another matter.

"And as I come back," he remarked, "I suppose I had better take Clear Stream in my way, and ask after Miss Boyle."

"It would not be amiss," agreed Mr. Muir. "The mother's a good tenant ; and, though she's just the very craziest old woman I ever did come across, I daresay she is fond of her child through all. I tell you what, Gorman, leave it

off till the afternoon, and we can walk over together."

Whether or not this arrangement was one which recommended itself to Mr. Gorman Muir, he assented to the suggestion with a good grace; and about three o'clock father and son set out to pay that visit which Mrs. Boyle arrayed herself to receive hours previously. Berna, knowing pretty well what was coming, had gone for a long walk early in the forenoon. When she saw her mother don fresh cap and best dress, she said she had a headache, and thought the air might do it good.

"Very likely, dear," said Mrs. Boyle, who desired nothing more earnestly than her daughter's absence; "and you need not be hurrying yourself. We'll tell Ruth to put the dinner-time back an hour, so you can take a fine long turn when you're about it."

Well the girl knew what this meant, and, interpreting her mother's permission in the widest sense, she remained out till she conceived the longest visit must have ended.

When Ruth opened the door Berna looked at her old nurse inquiringly ; but Ruth only shook her head. He had not been there, evidently, and the girl's heart sank within her. She was tired, her limbs were weary, and the air had not blown away her headache. She felt low and dispirited, and in no mood to reply cheerfully when Mrs. Boyle exclaimed, " O, here you are ! That's well. I told Ruth we'd only have a tray brought in to-day ; no call to spread a cloth, there's no knowing who might happen to step in."

" Are you expecting any one, mamma ?"

" Not to exactly say expect ; but I wouldn't be surprised if Mr. Gorman Muir looked in to pass the time of day. He did let fall a word about coming to see I'd got no cold through standing in the night air watching for you. Come now, take off your things as fast as you can, and let us get our dinner over."

" I do not want any dinner," said Berna. " I should like to lie down for an hour. If Mr. Muir does call, I would rather be out of the way."

“There you are again!” exclaimed Mrs. Boyle. “Was there ever such a girl before! Always thinking about yourself, walking till you are tired to death, and then coming home and wanting to be waited on hand and foot. However, go and lie down, it’s nothing to me; indeed, when you’re well you’re not such lively company anybody need break their heart to be without you for a while.”

It was something even to have got this permission, and Berna lost no time in availing herself of it. For nearly an hour she lay listening and thinking; but at last she fell into a dreamless sleep. When she awoke, darkness had set in, and Ruth was standing by the bedside with a candle in her hand.

“It’s nearly five o’clock, Miss Berna,” she said, in an eager whisper. “Mr. Muir and his son have been here this hour and more. They are going to stop for tea, and the mistress has sent me to call you.”

In the first moment of waking Berna had raised herself on her elbow, and rubbed her eyes, half blinded with the light. Now she lay down

again, sighing heavily. Evidently she felt no wild desire to add another to the festive party in the little sitting-room.

Ruth stood looking at her for a few seconds, every wrinkle in her toil-worn face expressive of the tenderest love and deepest compassion.

What ought her young lady not to have had in the way of wealth and pleasure and society? Well-born, well-bred, well-nurtured, she ought, had things gone as they should, to have been, as her nurse expressed the matter, among the "first in the land; and here she is, through her own free will, chained to a foolish mother but little better than me—worse nor me, indeed, because she hasn't a grain of sense, not enough to know when she's making a town talk of herself."

"I am afraid, miss dear," she said, after that minute's pause, "you'll have to go in among them. The mistress is in one of her humours, and she'll listen to nothing I can tell her. There'll only be a disturbance if you keep away. It's the father wants to see you. I think they've heard as much talk almost as they can stand. It has

been going straight on ever since they came in. If your mother had been running about with them since she was two years of age she couldn't be freer or more friendly. It's a burning shame, and I'll tell her so, once they're gone, whether she's pleased or displeased; but you'd best get up now—you had indeed. I'll just let them know you're coming, and then I'll slip back and do up your hair. O dear, O dear!" added poor Ruth, *sotto voce*, as she left the room; "to think of my child ever having to demean herself by going among the like of them! It's enough to make the poor master rise from his grave."

Ten minutes later, with the flush of sleep still tinging her cheeks, Berna walked along the passage, pausing for a moment at the parlour-door ere entering the room.

Talk—that is, Mrs. Boyle's talk—was still in full progress. The widow seemed in the height of her glory; she had got her audience, who were receiving as scant mercy as the Ancient Mariner showed to that unhappy wedding guest.

At the moment when Berna stood still, holding

the handle in her trembling fingers, Mrs. Boyle was in full cry across country, giving an account of her husband's death. "Though I did everything short of going down on my bended knees to him, he would ride that chestnut, which was one of the wickedest brutes in all Mayo. Well, and as I was saying—"

At that juncture Berna entered, a brilliant colour mantling in her cheeks, her eyes bright with feverish excitement, her heart sick with shame and sorrow, every nerve in her body in a state of tension.

As if a ghost had suddenly appeared before her, Mrs. Boyle stopped dead in her narrative.

"So you've come at last!" she exclaimed. "I am sure I don't know what Mr. Muir must think of you."

What Mr. Muir really thought was that he saw before him a very beautiful young girl; and as he took Berna's cold hand in his, he verbally expressed something of this idea. The man meant no offence: it was only his nature; but Gorman could see that Berna shrank a little more into herself as he spoke.

"Miss Boyle is not accustomed to such compliments," he said, with an uneasy laugh.

"Isn't she?" returned the farmer. "She'll get used to them after a bit, from some more likely person than me."

"She's far too young for anything of that sort," broke in Mrs. Boyle.

"Is she, now? I shouldn't have thought it," observed Mr. Muir, surveying Berna in a way which dyed her face with a still deeper crimson. "But never mind me, miss; it was only my joke; all I meant was, you're a very fine young woman, though your mother, as is natural, will have it you're still but a child."

"I hope you did not take any cold yesterday, Miss Boyle," said Gorman.

"Cold!" repeated the widow. "What would make her take cold? Your father and you took too good care of her for that; well wrapped and driven home, while I was fretting myself to death out in the damp night air, wondering what had become of her."

"And you ought to pay more heed to yourself

than stand out in the night air at your time of life," said Mr. Muir, who had no idea of founding any pleasing fiction on the fact of his tenant's age.

"I don't know what you mean about my time of life," answered Mrs. Boyle. "Trouble makes us all look old, but it can't make anybody really old. If I hadn't married younger than that girl there, and taken the weight of the world on myself before I was well out of the nursery—"

"You couldn't have looked better than you do," finished Mr. Muir, laudably anxious to conciliate. "It's not many that have come through as much could have kept the girl's figure you have, and been as light on your feet as yourself. Why, there's my eldest daughter Bell wants a month or two yet of being six-and-twenty, and I declare to my conscience she looks an old woman beside you."

"It's the mind does it, Mr. Muir," said the widow, in gracious explanation. "It's the mind. As my poor father used to say, 'You'll be a girl, Milly, till you are eighty year old.' I take after him; he was the merriest soul. The very morning

as he died in the evening he was liting out, 'The night before Larry was stretched,' and making us all screech with laughing. Ah, there's not many left like him."

"I remember him well," Mr. Muir remarked. "He was a short stout man, red-faced, with a squint. He'd put away many a tumbler of punch in his time, or I'm much mistaken. His nephew does not favour him much."

"No, that he doesn't," agreed Mrs. Boyle; "there's but little fun about Richard Vince. Not that I've a word to say against him. We can't all be pleasant and heartsome alike; and, maybe, it's not Richard's fault altogether that the cares of riches have been a yoke round his neck and a burden to his feet, as the Bible talks about."

Gorman Muir looked at the speaker in amazement. He had never previously conceived of such a woman as Mrs. Boyle. That she could be Berna's mother seemed to him monstrous. His own father might be, and was, objectionable; but at least no one could say he was a fool.

"She ought to be glad to marry me," he thought, "to get away from this;" and then he turned to Berna, who, with averted face, was gazing steadily into the fire, only to feel the girl's nature held something in it he might find it difficult exactly to understand.

"Stir yourself, now, Berna," commanded Mrs. Boyle, "and give Mr. Muir a cup of tea. I hope you'll make yourselves at home," she proceeded, with gracious hospitality; "we oughtn't to be like strangers to one another. Here's some apple jelly I made myself after we came to Clear Stream. Though I say it, I don't think you'd find better coloured in the county. When I was a girl I always did get praise for my preserves. As I often tell Berna there, she'll be a poor useless creature if ever she comes to have a house of her own."

"Maybe she'll not need to look after anything of the kind," suggested Mr. Muir.

"It's to be hoped she won't, indeed. If she's to see to much, I pity the man who gets her. She hasn't the least notion of making things com-

fortable; and as for conversation, you might as well expect it from a mute."

"Mamma is determined you shall not remain in ignorance of my faults, Mr. Muir," said Berna, trying to smile.

"You see," answered that gentleman, "when one in a house has heaps of talk, it is as well there is somebody knows how to hold her tongue. What do you think you'd do, Mrs. Boyle, if your daughter had as much to say as yourself?"

"I'd be thankful, I am sure. Many's the time and often I sit wondering what'll become of the girl when I am dead and gone, and she has nobody to speak up for her. To see me so lively and cheerful, you would never believe the amount of thought I have in me. And I need it all, too; for goodness only knows what would happen if I wasn't always considering something."

It was at this point Berna determinedly struck across her mother's monologue. Turning to Gorman, she asked him about Finney's Farm—if he had really decided to take it; whether he did not think the risk too great. Astonished, Mr.

Muir noticed the quick nervous decision of her manner; the resolute way in which she prevented any further exhibition of folly.

"There's a heap in her," he thought; "I wonder, now, whether it's bad or good?"

"You'll give us a song after a while, Miss Boyle, won't you?" he said. "It'll be long before I forget what you sang yesterday."

"I have a quantity of new music, if you would care to look at it," Gorman ventured; "some good duets, and—"

"Duets!" thought Berna, horrified. "Thank you," she answered, with that new manner which so surprised Mr. Muir; "but I never sang any duets excepting with papa, and I do not think I shall ever sing any again."

"Did you ever hear anything like her?" inquired Mrs. Boyle. "You might think no one had ever lost a father before."

"No one could have been fonder of a father," said Berna, with a dangerous flash in her eyes. No, never again, she determined, would she sit quiet and hear the dead spoken of as she had

done. "What should you like, Mr. Muir?" she asked, rising and going towards the piano, which was, indeed, an old instrument discarded from the schoolroom at Craigvallen; and she sang a couple of songs, while Mrs. Boyle giggled and chattered in audible whispers to the younger man.

"Give us something now with a bit of life in it, Berna," said the widow at last. "'Young Lochinvar,' or 'Sandy and the Mermaid,' or 'Allan-a-dale.'"

"'Allan-a-dale' is delightful," remarked Gorman.

"Yes; let's have 'Allan-a-dale,'" cried Mrs. Boyle. And when her daughter, after some natural hesitation, began that old-world ditty, she was good enough to join in with a high cracked voice, and many a twist and twirl and marvellous cadenza. The way she looked at Gorman and nodded her head, and tapped the floor with her foot, and generally—as Mr. Muir afterwards remarked—went on like a mad woman, was simply indescribable.

"She was off to the forest to hear a love tale,

And the youth it was told by was Allan-a-dale,'” sang the widow, with a triumphant toss of her cap, and a killing glance at Gorman. “That’s the sort of tune for me; none of your die-away heart-broken ballads.”

“And you’ve a fine shrill voice of your own yet, ma’am,” said Mr. Muir, in doubtful compliment. “Thank you, Miss Boyle; it’s a real treat to hear anybody able to sing like you. Now, Gorman, if you’re ready, we’d best be lessening the distance between here and Ardilaw.”

CHAPTER IX.

"SHE's not so bad-looking, Gorman," Mr. Muir remarked to his son, after they had proceeded for some short distance in silence.

"Who is not so bad-looking?" asked Gorman.

"That girl, the widow woman's daughter."

"O, Miss Boyle! I thought, perhaps, it was the widow herself you were talking about."

"Trust me for that, lad; I'm not so blind and I'm not so foolish as to bestow much attention on an old woman when a young one's nigh at hand. She's got quiet ways with her, too; but did you ever come across such a hawering idiot as the mother? I declare by my conscience there were times to-night when I didn't know which way to turn my eyes. And the cracked, squealing voice of her, too! Faith, it would be a queer sort of a man, Allan-a-dalé, or Allan-a-hill, or Allan-

a-anything else, would be if he wanted to meet her when he could help it."

"Certainly I should not care to keep such a forest assignation, but there is no accounting for tastes."

"That's true enough," agreed Mr. Muir, ere he relapsed once again into reverie.

The night was dark and the road bad, and as neither man seemed much disposed for conversation, they had walked more than half-way home ere Mr. Muir again spoke. Evidently he had been turning over some knotty subject in his mind.

"I wouldn't wonder," he at last began, "if there was a touch of consumption about that girl."

"What girl?" asked Gorman, who, though he understood, did not care to seem to do so.

"Miss Boyle, to be sure. Who else should I be speaking of? It wouldn't surprise me one bit to hear any day she was gone into a decline. Did you see the colour in her cheeks when she came through the doorway? she might have been painting them; and before five minutes were over

they were as white as the candle. That was for all the world the way Carline's cousin used to turn—the picture of health one hour, and the next looking only fit to be measured for her coffin, and it wasn't long before we had to follow hers. She got a chill at the Cultra Regatta, and before we'd the harvest in she was happed up in Hollywood churchyard. If that girl was anything to me, I wouldn't feel just easy in my mind about her; though, maybe, she'd be quite as well away from this world as in it, with no one to speak to but that half-cracked old mother."

Gorman shuddered; his father's words seemed to pierce him like the thrust of a sword. Such a notion had never crossed his mind before, but, now it had been forced upon his thoughts, how should he ever banish it? Berna, his Berna, dead! That fair face hidden away for ever; that sweet voice silenced; that swaying figure cold and still! The man could have cried aloud in his agony. In a moment, the vision of a funeral procession winding slowly from out the door of Clear Stream Cottage, across the dancing rivulet,

among the rose-trees, out into the lane, and thence to Dundonald Church, arose before him. It was one of those periods when the mind in imagination passes through a fiercer agony than the worst reality ever brings. He felt the sting of death, without its merciful numbing stupor. From out of life, flushed with health, in the spring-time of existence, in the fulness of her beauty, he beheld his first young love pass instantly through the golden gates, which, closing behind, shut him out from hope and happiness. He could not speak; it is no exaggeration to say he refrained from answer only because he was, for the time being, stricken dumb. But that silence served its purpose better than any speech could have done, for, believing he was addressing an unsympathetic auditor, Mr. Muir changed the subject of his conversation to Finney's Farm.

"I can't get the notion of leaving that lot of fine young horses up there alone with an old man and a ragamuffin dog," he observed.

"I can," answered Gorman.

"I wish you'd give me some reason for your

faith—that is, if you wouldn't mind telling it out."

"But that is exactly what I do mind, very much," replied his son. "You've told me yourself you believed at one time the very grass in the county Down had ears; and there is an old story about Midas and the reeds, which, like many other old stories, holds a lesson. I am not going to talk about Finney's Farm—or Sunnyside Farm, as I mean to call it—out here, at any rate. Doey has done well by me so far, and I intend to trust him further."

"I have nothing to say against the man; only if some morning you walked up the hill and found some of your best stock maimed, and Doey stiff with a bullet in his head, you wouldn't be best pleased."

"No, faith; but if ever such a thing should come to pass, there will be a job for the hangman at the next assizes. I swear that, and I don't care who hears me. Now, we've had quite enough about death and dying, I think, for one night; and, if you are of my opinion, we'll push on and

get to the fire. What with your pleasant talk concerning the two curses of Ireland, consumption and cowardice, and the wet of these confounded roads, I am fairly shivering."

"If you meant that shot about cowardice for me, you fired wide," said Mr. Muir. "I'm no more a coward than yourself; but I do count it foolhardy for a man to walk straight into a road where he is likely to be knocked over like a rabbit."

"I won't let either fear or threats prevent my walking along any road I have got to travel," retorted Gorman hotly. "For the rest, I never said or thought you were a coward. Only it seems to me, people cannot be very brave when a whole country-side agrees to let a farm lie idle because a few lazy vagabonds declare no one shall till it."

"Well, well, you mustn't blame me, no matter what comes to pass."

"If your pleasing prophecy proves correct, I shall not be here to blame you," replied his son. "Ere many days are over I think I'll go up and share Doey's hut, so that no harm may come to

you through my self-will. I don't want the Ardilaw ship to founder because such a Jonah as myself happens to be among the company."

"I'll chance that," answered the farmer. "If we're to be set light to, you'd best be close at hand, maybe, to help put out the flames. All the same, though, I wish any other piece of land would have served your turn. You might have had Kilmoon and welcome."

"I did not want Kilmoon."

"I know you didn't; and that's what fairly beats me. Why you should take up with a few acres on a bare hillside, when the richest bit of land in the parish is offered to you, passes my comprehension."

"Kilmoon is six times dearer."

"And six times better soil."

"Soil doesn't signify to me."

"More's the pity."

"Besides, I had set my heart on Finney's Farm."

"There ought to be some sense in what you set your heart on."

"I am afraid you will find there is neither sense nor reason in most of the things a man like myself takes a notion of."

"That is just what I am beginning to be afraid of myself."

"You see, sir, you can't live my life for me."

"And I'm very sure I wouldn't wish to live it for you if I could."

"Well, well, for mercy's sake don't let us quarrel. I want to get home; I'm chilled to my bones."

"Something has gone wrong with you to-night, Gorman. I wonder what it is?"

"Is not walking up to the knees in mud enough to try the temper of any man? I wonder, seeing the magnificent roads they have in Antrim, you Down folk are not ashamed of the metal you lay down. It grinds fairly into pulp."

"That's been the way ever since Mr. Desmond forced them to pull all the turnpikes down."

"How did he force them?"

"He wouldn't pay toll, and it wasn't likely anybody else would. He went clean over the

Newtonards Bar, horse and dog-cart, and groom and himself. He was a Justice of the Peace, and he spent his life trying legally to break the law. One day in Belfast he was driving a pair through Donegall Place, and one of them, being a trifle skittish, got on the side-path. Well, they had him up, and inflicted a fine, and he went away. A month later what does he do but goes into town with a four-in-hand—three horses and an ox—and may I never stir, but he drove the length of High Street, in the busiest part of the day, with the horses in the road and the ox on the kerb. There was nothing in the Corporation by-laws then providing against such a thing; and he laughed at the police. No matter what he did after that, nobody interfered with him.”

“What an agreeable person!”

“He was pleasant enough to speak to, but hard—just the reverse of his son Cornelius. They say it broke his heart to see Corny light a second candle one night when there was company. Here’s Ardilaw, at last.”

“Thank Heaven!” ejaculated Gorman.

“And I see Carline’s kept up a fine fire in your sitting-room.”

“Carline is worth her weight in gold.”

“That’s saying a deal for any woman. But there’s worse than Carline.”

“There are, faith; and we needn’t go out of Ardilaw to find them.”

Which retort so confirmed Mr. Muir’s notion concerning something having “put Gorman out” that he decided it might be wise to hold his peace.

They were met on the threshold by Carline, her hair a little tossed, her face somewhat scorched, her manner bright and excited. Gorman looked at her, and again his heart sank within him. His thoughts recurred to the cousin who had caught cold at Cultra Regatta, and he wondered if all beauty in woman was to be regarded but as death’s sign manual. In that soft deceitful climate were all things fair and tender created only for the grave?

“Come in,” she exclaimed, “and see the fire I’ve built up for you. I made Peter fetch in a

great basket of turf, and it's all of a glow. He wouldn't stop to see you, he said he had nothing worth speaking about. O, and he bade me give you the cutting whip you left up there. He was afraid you might think you had lost it."

"Thank you, Carline; I am glad to see it again;" and Gorman took the little gold-mounted whip in his hand and slashed the air, as a lad might have done.

"You set great store by that," said Mr. Muir, the strongest passion in whose strong nature was jealousy.

"I do. It was a present."

"I thought as much. From some lady, no doubt."

"You are wrong, for once, father. I gave it to myself, with many good wishes, in the days when I was rich enough to make presents. I rejoice to have it in my hand again."

Mr. Muir possessed such excellent sense that he failed to believe one word of this story. Hitherto he had found Gorman truthful to an extent verging on folly; but "a man," argued

the farmer, "can't doubt the evidence of his senses." Here was Gorman, who all the way from Clear Stream had been sulky as sulky could be, now laughing and singing like a boy. Clearly the whip had been a love token. Some place there lived a strange woman, who eventually would take his son from him. It was for her sake he wanted to make money fast, and would have nothing to say to Miss Garnsey, and "most times" went himself to the post for letters. Yes, if once Gorman got "a bit before the world" he should lose him—lose the son he loved as he once thought never to love anything; who was the height of good company when "no mood was on him;" who was something to be proud of, to think about, to plan with, and plot for.

Such a change as came over Gorman from the time he entered Ardilaw, Mr. Muir decided, was never beheld. He joked with Bell about her sour looks, and did not even draw down his own brows when the farmer suggested that lady might chance, before she was much older, to have Mrs. Boyle for sister instead of mother-in-law. "She's

set her cap at Gorman now, and I'm all out in the cold," he exclaimed.

That night Gorman had a pleasant look and word for every one; and before his father went to bed, the young fellow, standing in the middle of the old drawing-room, said, "I think, sir, I spoke to you as we were coming home as I ought not to have done, and I want to beg your pardon."

Mr. Muir felt quite taken aback; his heart swelled with emotion. Rudeness, quarrelling, and cold self-consideration had so entirely ruled his home that Gorman's unintelligible pettishness and impetuous repentance filled his heart with a sensation as new as strange.

"Tuts, that's nothing," he exclaimed; "don't imagine that though you are my son, I forget you're a grown man and have a right to your own notions. The only thing troubles me is that I often think we don't rightly understand one another. There's many a way I might help you, if I only knew betimes you wanted help."

"Perhaps," said Gorman doubtfully.

"Well, I'll try to get some sleep now, at any

rate. I want to go to the town early to-morrow. Don't be vexing yourself about me. When you give me a sore heart I'll tell you, never fear."

"I trust I never may; I trust in God I never may!" answered his son earnestly.

"Then likely you'll tell me some day why you set such store by the cutting whip."

"Yes; that I will," and Gorman broke into a ringing laugh. "Good-night, father; pleasant dreams. I am not going to bed for a long time yet, so if you hear any noise you'll know I'm making it."

"Good-night," said Mr. Muir, with a nod. He had never, in all the fifty years of his life, arrived at that stage of conventional affection which induces members of a family, living under the same roof, to shake hands on meeting and parting, and he felt shy about beginning such a practice.

When he was once more alone, Gorman again took up the cutting whip and looked at it with a satisfied smile.

CHAPTER X.

OVER Ardilaw the very genius of Silence seemed keeping mute watch. Not a sound broke the stillness. It was a night when nor bird nor beast appeared wakeful; not a twig stirred, not a dead leaf fell. The stones in the river might have been thick with moss, so muffled was the flow of the water. In the outbuildings Mr. Muir's cattle were sleeping quietly; even the wild birds lay close in their hiding-places. The darkness suggested the idea that it was holding its breath to listen for the coming of some catastrophe. Out from the room where Carline's turf fire, more than once replenished since she lifted her lovely face for her brother's parting kiss, was burning low Gorman stepped as though shod with velvet. For two or three minutes he stood at the foot of the wide staircase listening intently. Throughout the old house there reigned silence, utter, complete.

The very mice that night went about their business gingerly.

Satisfied that every one was at rest, Gorman passed back into the sitting-room he had just left, exchanged his slippers for a pair of stout shooting-boots, fastened on strong serviceable leggings, buttoned a rough top-coat across his chest, put on a glengarry cap, looked carefully to the priming of a pair of pistols which he thrust into one deep pocket, dropped a flask, containing whisky, undiluted, into the other, and thus provided against all contingencies of weather, time, and danger, once more stole out into the hall, opened noiselessly the heavy oaken door, which he locked from the outside, carrying the key off with him, and keeping close under the sullen shadow thrown by the house that made the darkness well-nigh impenetrable, he made his way down to the stream at a point nearer Ardilaw than that once chosen by Carline for her meeting with the Ensign. Here a couple of trunks of trees, roughly shorn of their branches, had been thrown across the water, and over these Gorman made his way to the opposite

bank. Arrived there, he proceeded up stream, still taking heed to his steps, and availing himself of such shelter as the nut-bushes and other undergrowth afforded, as much as possible avoiding the open, and, where the lower path was practicable, never venturing up on the higher ground. With stealthy caution he thus pursued his course till he reached Finney's Farm. Then, feeling his way over some great stones placed in the bed of the river, he recrossed to the south-east bank.

There he paused; and, imitating exactly the flop and scurry of a water-rat suddenly surprised, listened. From the direction of the house which had been burnt down came the peevish yap-yapping of a dog, barking for very irritation at having been disturbed out of sound sleep. That sound died away, and was followed by the whirr-r-r of a pheasant. Gorman waited about half a minute after that ere, still neglecting no precaution, he climbed the bank, and, under cover of a ditch surmounted by a hedge of straggling thorn, struck as straight as possible for the en-

closure where his young horses were nightly sheltered.

This enclosure owed its origin partly to the ingenuity and greatly to the selfishness of Mr. Peter Doey. Having made up his mind that taking service with young Muir would insure various pecuniary advantages to himself, he determined that—seeing furthering his master's interests was likely to advance his own—no stone should be left unturned which could possibly insure success to the new venture.

“And where am I to stop, sorr,” he asked, after Gorman had unfolded a vague plan for housing his young cattle, “airly and late as I’d need to be on the ground?”

“O, you might find a lodging almost anywhere close at hand, I should think,” conjectured Gorman.

“Yes; or I mightn’t. When a man is expected to give his whole thought to one matter, it’s half the battle for him to be able to think that thought without disturbance. You don’t know, master, the power of consideration I can

get through if I can have peace to smoke my pipe, without having the heart broke in me by a scolding woman and a lot of crying babbies. You let me rig up a shanty for myself inside those four bare walls—a few boards and a barrowful of straw won't ruin you—and I'll plan a yard for the colts and another for the older and steadier creatures, God bless them all! and then I'll be myself in the middle of them like Noah in his ark, and devil one of the lot will lift a hoof or give a cough but me and Sniff will know the reason."

Thus it came to pass that Mr. Doey now resided upon the premises. In the west window of his hut there shone, as Gorman beheld from afar, a steady light, not fierce, but subdued—the sort of light which might keep in all night, and which, in fact, Mr. Doey was in the habit of so keeping. A white blind was drawn across the glass, but no shadow could be seen reflected on it; apparently the house was closely shut up for the night; even the sleepless Sniff gave no sign of life.

Cautiously Gorman trod softly along by the railings of the enclosure, formed of unbarked young

fir-trees split in two, till he came to a gate, which opened for his entrance and closed after him as if by magic ; then a hand was laid on his arm, and Peter guided him to a shed hard by, into which both men passed noiselessly.

“ They’ll be nigh at hand now,” whispered Doey ; “ sit down on the hay.”

“ My gun,” said Gorman, in the same low tone.

“ Here she is, ready loadened. Don’t fire her till I give Sniff the word, and then, for the Lord’s sake, aim low.”

“ You’re sure, Doey, the charge is all right ? Wouldn’t it be safer to draw it and reload ?”

“ Tits !” was the contemptuous reply. “ Now don’t be fretting about the gun. She’s all right. Lay your hand on Sniff’s back, and you’ll know when they’re in the meadow, though you can’t hear a beetle rustling.”

Gorman, thus admonished and directed, laid his hand on the dog, who was apparently plunged in refreshing slumber. For five minutes—ten—fifteen—an unbroken silence prevailed ; then, suddenly, he became conscious of a creeping of

Sniff's skin, and knew the animal had raised his head, and cocked one vagabond ear.

"Quiet," muttered Peter, in a lengthened drawl. "It's you, sorr," he added, "throws the poor brute out. Don't touch him any more. They're coming."

Yes, they were coming. Young Muir rather felt than heard their approach; and, rising, took his gun, and, peering out into the night, waited Doey's signal.

Gorman felt his excitement rising to an almost uncontrollable extent. He could hear Sniff's panting breathing, and through the darkness was able to distinguish the figures of two men. They went straight up to the hut Doey had erected inside the burnt house, and knocked, at first gently, then more loudly.

"Be ready, sorr," whispered Doey, lifting his own gun.

"Oughtn't we to challenge them?" said Gorman.

"Challenge be damned!" retorted Doey, at the same time striking the ground with his foot.

Instantly Sniff flew out, barking furiously.

“Whatever you do, no higher nor their legs;” and, so saying, Doey ran forward with a wild shout of defiance. At the same moment he fired both barrels, and, as a yell of pain and surprise broke the stillness, another report followed. This time there came only a curse; and Gorman, pulling out his pistols, was about to rush towards the men, who were now in full retreat, when Doey held him back, exclaiming, “No murder, sorr! God preserve you, Mr. Gorman, keep quiet. What they’ve got will do for them this while. No, you sha’n’t. If you want to shoot somebody, shoot me, or Sniff. What the —— is that?” he broke off to exclaim, as a loud shout of “Help! help!” rang out across the night.

In one second Gorman was over the fence and flying in the direction whence the sound came, with Sniff, hounded on by his master, joyously leading the van, while Doey himself hurried after at a speed of which no one could have supposed him capable.

“Are you hurt?” he cried, helping Gorman to raise a man who was stretched full length on the sward. “Speak, whoever you are. What’s wrong with you?”

“It’s my father,” said Gorman. “See to him while I go after those scoundrels.”

“Just see to him yourself,” retorted Doey. “What call had he coming where he wasn’t wanted? Nobody could have hurt him if he hadn’t put himself forward; and as for those scoundrels, as you call them, I know where they’ll be to be found to-morrow if you want them. If the calves of their legs are smarting now, they’ll be smarting worse in the morning. That’s right, sorr, give him a sup of whisky; he’s on’y shook a bit. He’ll be as well as ever in a minute. Lean on me, Mr. Muir. It was the throw you got, wasn’t it?—ay, I deemed as much. Lean heavier, sorr; put your full weight on me. Don’t be a hair afeared; I’ll not go over with you. Now, Mr. Gorman, pull yourself together; your father’s worth a dozen dead ones yet—aren’t you, Mr. Muir? You’ll live to bury all of us, maybe.

Here, Sniff, hie home, my lad. Heth and feth, if he hasn't the sense of all the Christians in the parish."

Still feeling dizzy and confused, with a vague wonder as to how he came to be walking in the middle of the night down the hill leading to Ardilaw supported by his son and Peter Doey, Mr. Muir eventually found himself tottering along his own back avenue, crossing his own stable-yard, entering his kitchen, and speculating, in a dreamy sort of way, what Bell would find to remark about the mud three men's boots were capable of leaving upon the floor.

"We'll have him up to bed now, Mr. Gorman," said Doey, whose experience both in matters of accident and of drunkenness might be considered exhaustive; and, acting on this suggestion, Mr. Muir was, as Peter expressed the matter, "convoyed" up-stairs, only to be confronted with the awful apparition of Miss Isabella in nightgown and nightcap.

Mrs. Caudle herself could not have presented a more terrifying spectacle.

"I'd like to know—" she was beginning, when Gorman cut across her speech.

"Should you?" he said; "then you won't know to-night. Some one must sit up with my father. Shall I call Carline?"

"Certainly not, so long as I am mistress in the house," answered Bell.

"Ah! and it's not here you'd be stopping long, miss, if some I know had their own way," murmured Peter, with rapturous admiration.

"Does that man want any drink?" asked Miss Muir.

"If he does, I can give it to him," said Gorman. "Thank you, Doey," he added, "I couldn't have got my father into bed as you've done. Now come down-stairs with me. There's hot water about the house some place, I suppose; the kitchen fire is never to say out, and—"

"Give me a drop, master, without any water at all, just as much as you could cock your finger over. What's that you're saying, sorr? Will I stop here, or will you go with me? Ha, ha! It's little you know of Peter yet. Just turn in

where you are, and have a good sound sleep yourself, Mister Gorman, and I'll take my old bones up the hill and have an hour or two there. Won't I be afraid? Ah, there, get along with you, do! Now, wait till I tell you, and mind what I'm saying. This blessed night as ever was we've scotched the last snake on Finney's Farm. You go to Beechfield to-morrow morning and take a lease of the land. *Get a promise in writing from Garnsey. I know him.* Nobody'll ever trouble you again. They'll be laughed out of the county. Leave it all to me. I know how to deal with them."

"But, good heavens! Doey, men with that amount of shot in their legs must feel revengeful."

"Devil a shot, Mr. Gorman! *I loaded with bay salt!*"

CHAPTER XI.

“TURN your head a bit, Mr. Gorman ; a trifle more to the left, sorr. You see that gap in the ditch ? Well, it was just out in the road there Tony Morrison met his death. I was standing here at the very minute. I helped to pick him up.”

“Ay, indeed ; and how did that happen ? was he murdered ? Had *he* taken land over anybody’s head ?”

“Murdered ? Bless your heart, no, sorr ; and as for land, he neither let nor took it. He lived in his own house, as his father and grandfather had lived before him ; and there was a meadow or two about it, and a garden and stable-yard, and all befitting. He wasn’t a farmer, either gentleman or working. He had a good income of his own, and was well liked through all the county.”

“What killed him, then ?” asked Gorman.

“I’m coming to that, your honour. As I tell you, I saw his last hour, and he’d no more thought it was at hand than you have this blessed minute.”

“How did he die?”

“I was going to tell you. He was a fine rider; he was a finer rider—if that were possible—I think, even than yourself. I don’t mean to say he had your gait in the saddle, but he had as good a grip of his horse; and, faith, he never saw the leap that frightened him. As I stand here, I can’t help thinking how, with the best horse that ever was shod, it’s often just a step from the stirrup to the grave.”

“In a word, I suppose Mr. Morrison was thrown at last.”

“Faith, he was that, and in the queerest way. Himself and Mr. Cornelius Desmond were coming back from the Maze races, and they had been trotting gently till after they passed that bridge beyond, when Desmond says to Morrison, says he, ‘Corne, let’s see which of us’ll be at the turning to Knock graveyard first.’

‘ Ah ! I’ll be that,’ says Morrison, laughing ; and he clips his mare (she was a beauty) with his heels, and away they both went. Well, it’s a clean good bit of road, as you see, Mr. Gorman, and they both tore along, the thuds of their horses’ hoofs sounding clear through the air, as your own might do. In the field below us there were some pigs feeding, and one of them, likely frightened by the noise, just as they were passing, ran out into the road, and partly across it. Desmond’s horse was about half a length behind, and just missed the creature ; but it got among the legs of Mr. Morrison’s mare, and in one second they were all down—Morrison pitched clean out of the saddle twenty feet ahead, and the mare and the pig all jumbled up together. We ran as hard as we could—Mat Lupus was with me—and we got into the road just as Mr. Desmond stopped his horse, for they were going so fast it wasn’t possible for him to pull up sooner.

“ When we came to the place where Morrison was lying, we found a pool of blood, and him in the middle of it, with the poor dumb brute lick-

ing him. Many a time I've thought about that since, master ; many and many's the time. The creature that couldn't speak knew something was wrong, and there she stood licking him like a Christian, as much as to say, 'Show me how I can help you, and I'll do it.' "

"His neck was broken, I suppose?" suggested Gorman, and his voice sounded a little hoarse, for the incident had touched him, as the story of an animal's faithful affection always must touch a heart which, however wayward, is brave and tender.

"No, it wasn't," answered Peter. "The force his head came on the hard ground killed him. I think I hear the thud of it now while I am talking to you. Ay, both Mat and me heard that above the noise of Desmond's horse galloping like mad. The life was still in him when we lifted him up. He didn't die till night ; but he never spoke nor moved again. Faith, as Mr. Desmond said, and the tears were in his eyes when he spoke the words, 'Morrison was at the turn to Knock graveyard first. Ay, and in his grave, too!' We buried

him three days after in the family vault up there, where the Morrisons have been lying snug and quiet for generations. That was a funeral, I can tell you. The following stretched from the Newtonards Road up to the very churchyard gates. You never saw such a sight. It was like the day of judgment. If the dead had risen there couldn't have been a greater crowd than was that afternoon in Knock graveyard; the ground was black with people, every man standing bare-headed; and the lough, and the Antrim hills, and the woods about Stormont, and the green sloping country down by Holywood, framed, in a manner, by the old arched window, that hasn't had as much glass as you could see an eclipse of the sun through, in it within the memory of man. You've never been up at Knock graveyard, have you, Misther Gorman? Ah! it would be well worth your while to take a walk to it this minute, if only to look at what's to be seen through that arched window. If you like, I'll step up there with you, and show you where Morrison was buried. It's a fine heartsome place. There's

always some sort of wind stirring among the headstones."

This alluring description apparently so captivated Gorman's fancy, that he agreed to Mr. Doey's proposal; and the pair accordingly walking their horses, passed along the lane Mr. Morrison had proposed to reach first, till they came to the avenue leading to Knock graveyard. Up the hill they slowly wound, and when the gates which stand so hospitably wide were reached, tied their cattle to some railings, where the creatures could reach the short sweet grass growing beside the solemn way that led but to the grave, and entered the lonely burial-ground. Old monuments, stones all on one side, mounds which the turf had already covered, heaps of rough clay piled above the last home of the lately dead; a few shrubs, probably self-planted, growing wild. To the west, a belt of trees; and on all other sides views of mountain and sea, and grassy hills, and waving woods, and rich cultivated land. As he reached the crest of the mound Gorman paused and drew a long deep breath of surprise and admiration.

In a moment the whole enchanted scene lay stretched before him : the blue treacherous lough, calm as a millpond ; the bold Antrim coast, mountain merging into mountain ; the softer beauty of Down—green slopes, thick woods, eternal undulation.

“ It is most beautiful ! ” he exclaimed.

“ Step this way, and look at it through the arch,” said Peter, with the pride of a showman ; and then he stopped, as suddenly as his companion.

Leaning against one of the mullions, gazing with rapt contemplation at the view, stood a girl dressed in black. She had not heard their approach, but remained so still, she might have been one of the dead risen from her last narrow resting-place to take a final survey of so beautiful a world.

Gorman did not speak ; but Doey could see the blood rushing up into his dark face, and an eager tender expression lying in the depths of his sunny brown eyes.

“ It’s Miss Boyle,” said the man in a whisper.

“Hush!” answered Gorman; but already Berna had turned her head, and saw that she was not alone.

The girl did not advance to meet young Muir, but in one moment he was by her side. Peter saw the meeting, and, turning a little aside, smiled to himself.

“I’ll not spoil sport,” he murmured. Then he plucked a spine off a young fir-tree close at hand, and ate it with great relish. “I always ‘evened’ that was how the land lay,” proceeded Peter, in silent colloquy. “I wonder now if she’s got a notion of him? Why wouldn’t she, though? If she travelled Ireland through she couldn’t meet a finer figure of a man.” Having arrived at which stage in his argument, Mr. Doey gathered another fir-spine, which he munched as he might had it been salad.

He had barely finished this light repast before the sound, not of footsteps—for the tread of those who walk over the silent dead makes no louder echo than the tenants lying beneath the sod—but of voices, warned him Berna and his master

were close at hand. He turned, and, touching his hat, said to the latter,

“This is the vault, sorr. It was down them very steps six gentlemen carried the coffin. I’ll never forget the sight, never till the day of my death. A king could scarce have had a grander following.”

“Who was it?” asked Berna; for though speaking to Gorman, Doey’s eyes had appealed to her as he spoke.

“Mr. Morrison, Miss Boyle; a man thought well of by rich and poor. He met his death on the old Dundonald Road out by, as I was telling Mr. Muir. No better rider ever tightened a horse’s girth. He had no more thought of death than you have this minute. Me and another were watching him coming along laughing and galloping like mad, when, before you could have clapped hands, he was out of the saddle for the last time; his mare down, too, with her knees cut to bits, on the top of a beast of a pig that fouled her. But what have I said wrong, miss? I am sure I—”

“Hold your tongue, you fool!” commanded Gorman. “If you hadn’t been so much taken up with your confounded story, you would have seen I was making signs for you to stop. Did you never hear how her father met his death?” And the young man rushed after Berna, who had drawn down her veil, and was hurrying over the uneven surface of the desolate graveyard.

Very philosophically Doey regarded the retreating figures. Ere again helping himself to fir, he observed aloud,

“No, Mr. Gorman, I never did hear how her father came by his death; and maybe it was just as well, for now you’ve got another chance. There’s nothing a woman, young or old, likes better nor a good cry, if there’s a likely man at hand to help wipe up her tears. Faith, and it’s myself’ll be looking for half-a-crown, anyway, if you make the use of your time you might do. Well, I expect I’d best be moving. Neither of you’ll be back here to-day, or I’m much mistaken. There, may I never! if that masterful brute hasn’t slipped his bridle off! O, you

contrary divil!—stand still!—would you, now? Stand still when I bid you; d'ye hear what I'm saying? Do you know who it is spaking to you? Gorman Muir himself's not more head-strong than you. Come, I'm not going to put up with your nonsense any longer; open your mouth this minute. I don't want to look at your teeth. There, there; gently, gently. Man alive! I wouldn't hurt you, not for a thousand pounds counted down in golden guineas. We're the best friends alive, aren't we, old chap?" and having, with such and suchlike soothing professions of love and confidence, contrived to get the bridle on again, Mr. Doey, in view of further complications which might ensue if the horse were left to his own devices, began walking him up and down, till Gorman should return.

The young man was not long; he breasted the hill with a quick, free step, and as he drew near, Peter saw something in his face which conveyed the assurance matters had not gone wholly wrong.

"I am sure I beg the young lady's pardon, Mister Gorman," he said, while holding the

stirrup. "Maybe I oughtn't to have made so free; but I didn't know, and I don't know now, the way Mr. Boyle came to leave his wife a widow. How could I tell, sorr, he hadn't died in his bed, like most of the quality?"

"No, Peter, you couldn't," was the answer; "and I am sorry to have spoken to you so roughly. Mr. Boyle went out one morning on a chestnut horse as wild as a buck, that reared so high it went right over, with its rider under, crushing him cruelly. That was how he died, Doey; and naturally your talk about Mr. Morrison brought the whole thing back to his daughter's mind. She was there, and saw it all."

"I wish I'd bitten my tongue out, your honour, before I vexed as pleasant a young lady as ever anybody need wish to speak to. It's no wonder she looks mournful like. However, please God, the good time's all to come to her. I was speaking at the post-office the other morning to the servant they have up at Clear Stream; and if Miss Berna, as they call her, had been a saint, she couldn't have said more in her praise than

she did. She'll be making a big marriage one of these days."

Gorman did not answer; he only took his horse a little better in hand as he rode slowly down the hill. When they reached the cross lane, he pulled up and said, "I wish you'd ride round by the station, and see if any parcel is lying there for me."

"I'll do that, Misther Gorman."

"And, Doey."

"Yes, sorr."

"I have not given you half what I meant to do for that good night's work you did a fortnight ago."

"Never mention that, your honour. I want nothing. It was the height of divarsion to me."

"Here's a trifle more you can keep, at any rate," and Gorman thrust three pound notes into Doey's apparently reluctant fingers. "And don't forget to ask about the parcel," Gorman added, as he turned away.

"Never fear, sorr; Peter won't forget;" having uttered which assurance, Peter, with some

difficulty, induced his horse to start in the opposite direction from that his master was pursuing.

Once, however, he had turned the corner of the lane and was fairly in the old road, Mr. Doey reined in, and, smoothing Gorman's present across his thigh, looked with rapture at the filthy bits of paper which represented value to the extent of sixty shillings.

"He's off after her," he considered, "and not a parcel of any sort will I find at the station. Well, love's a mighty queer thing, as old Molly Murphy said when her son took up with a 'skelly-eyed' girl, with scarce a dud to her back, and freckled like a turkey's egg."

CHAPTER XII.

THERE are not many persons who are able to grow younger day by day ; but Mrs. Boyle contrived to perform this feat entirely to her own satisfaction. The rejuvenation process dated from the evening when Gorman Muir and she “foregathered”—when, stalwart man on one side of a rustic gate, and lovely woman on the other, those few words were exchanged which convinced the widow she had not been mistaken that from the instant Gorman’s eyes rested on her fair form he was, to adopt her own expression, “gone.”

Till that time, her idea had been to trouble the peace of Muir senior. But after Gorman spoke those soul-thrilling words, “dear Mrs. Boyle,” she felt it would be most unkind to the younger man were she to evince any marked preference for his father.

“Indeed, and if I married old Muir we’d be

just a laughing-stock," she decided. "Why, strangers would take us for grandfather and grandchild. Once I throw off these black clothes it's more like a girl in her teens I'll be looking than a woman that has buried her husband and seen all the troubles of this wicked world. Come May, I'll have been left a sorrowful widow twelve months; and then I can lighten my mourning a bit. O, it's heathenish to bid a woman with a weight of care in her heart go about the world with two rows of stiff white muslin under her bonnet. And me that black never did 'set'! The first time I ever met Ulick I'd on a pink gown. Well I mind it—seven tucks, no less, there were in the skirt; and he said the colour in my cheeks shamed the dyer's art. I wonder, when he lay on the green sod, with the last breath leaving him, whether he thought of the young wife, who married him for love, that he wasn't leaving a tenpenny piece to bless herself with? Well, well, a handsomer man than he ever was (and whatever faults Ulick Boyle had, he was personable, and as fine a figure as ever you'd meet in Sackville Street.

Didn't I think myself the made woman the night he offered for me? Shall I ever forget that ball at Kegan's, when they had rivers of milk-punch and wine for the asking?) is after me now, and will make a grand lady of me yet. I wish he had more notion of himself. He needn't be so shy, hanging back for fear of offending me when his heart is bursting with the words he's afraid to speak. It's not like as if I was a young child, never had had an offer. Sometimes I think it's Berna's cold, heartless way cows him. It would be natural for him to feel timid about putting division between mother and daughter; and I know she'll never forgive me if I change my name—just as if because I've buried one husband I was never to have another!"

With the fine spring weather Mrs. Boyle put out leaves of youth and gladness, like the trees. Her light step grew lighter, her faded eyes brighter, her complexion clearer, her manner more juvenile. She went singing about the house and warbling as though she had been a nightingale among the laurels and rose-trees

surrounding Clear Stream Cottage. She was always urging Berna to pin some knot of colour on her dress.

“All the fretting in the world,” she said, “won’t bring the dead back again. We’ve got our lives to live; and, for my part, I don’t mean to go on year after year, and year after year, as I have done, miserable and mournful, as if I had murdered Ulick Boyle, like that wicked woman Judith they’re always reading about in church. What’s that you’re saying—the story of Judith is in the Apocrypha? I know that as well as you; but one part of the Bible is as good as another, I hope. It’s written for our learning, and if you’d study the ten blessed commandments, and learn to be respectful and obedient to your own mother instead of contradicting her, and putting yourself forward at every turn, it would be more becoming than reading Apocryphas, and things like that.”

“O dear! O dear!” groaned poor old Ruth, as she saw, day by day, how the life was telling upon “her child.” “The mistress’ll never rest till she frets her into her coffin. Why doesn’t the

man speak and be done with it? Why can't he say out he's not coming after the old mother, but the daughter? I'd tell her myself, only she'd never believe me. Why, it was only yesterday she said she felt light as a feather, and, I thought to myself, no feather could be lighter or foolisher. Anybody but herself might see the change has come on Miss Berna. Why, even Miss Muir asked me the other day what was ailing her: 'She looks,' says Miss Muir, 'as if she hadn't strength to get about.' And, indeed, that's true; but she'll go on till she drops."

After a long dull winter, Spring at last came smiling upon the earth, her emerald robe spangled with primroses and all the fair fragile flowers that first lift their heads above ground. In the woods, birds were mating and building and twittering, busy as busy could be; the larch was hanging out its tassels, the willows were covered with catkins, wild anemones carpeted the ground, the streams ran joyously on their way, the landscape was flooded with sunshine, the air was full of that fresh, nameless odour which never greets us save

when the sap is rising—but strength seemed as far from Berna as ever. From that day when she took shelter at Ardilaw she began to decline. She did not complain. She made mention of no ailment; but she felt sometimes as though life were a burden too heavy to bear. Upon her tired brain Mrs. Boyle's incessant babble beat with the weary monotony of a hammer; the shame, and the trouble, and the sorrow of the widow's insane delusion fretted Berna like a running sore. Rest—save when for a time in fitful sleep she forgot her wretched present, and through dreamland entered once again some scene of past delight—she never knew the meaning of the word. The lonely rambles up the hillsides and across the valley, which she once found so soothing, so efficacious in exorcising the demons of passionate regret and more passionate pride, had been long relinquished. Walking wearied her; and even had this not proved the case, she must have abandoneū wandering over the country by herself, for, finally, there seemed no spot where Gorman failed to find her. They had met in the most

unlikely places—by the Druid's stone, beside the waterfall on the way to Gilnakirk, in Knock graveyard, on the heights above Stormont, on the far-off road leading to the Castlereagh hills, looking down on the Lough from Holywood, or gazing at the distant Gobbins and the blue line indicating the Scotch coast; wherever Berna was, Gorman, as a rule, found her—the most persistent of lovers, the most modest of wooers—tender, pleading, deferential, yet insistent: the girl could not venture beyond the narrow precincts of her home without encountering a man she wished to avoid, and not even in her home was she able to avoid him. If she stopped in her own room, he remained for hours listening to Mrs. Boyle's even stream of maddening folly, waiting for the footstep which, though tardy, had to come at last, hungering for the sight and voice of the girl he had grown to love to distraction.

There were no means he left untried to win a word from her, yet ice could not have seemed colder, stone more insensible, than Berna Boyle. He told her about his young mother, about Clon-

mellin, his own boyhood, his uncle's kindness, the loss of fortune he had sustained through treachery, the efforts he was determined to make to regain his former position ; but to all appearance he could not sway the heart of his listener. One day, when Mrs. Boyle had left the room to see to the due preparation of some dainty she knew that "wrong-headed old Ruth would spoil only because she is aware I want it for Gorman," the young man happened to drop a hint to the effect he would be willing so far to sacrifice his own inclinations as to let the widow share her daughter's future home. Instantly Berna turned on him. What she said she never could afterwards quite remember. She only knew her lover sat stunned. During the remainder of the visit he scarcely uttered a syllable, and when he left his farewell was frigid in its respectful propriety.

"When will you learn to behave yourself?" asked Mrs. Boyle, when the door closed after their visitor. "Am I never to have a friend come but he must be made miserable through your notions? You'd better stop up in your own room altogether,

miss, till you come to your senses. Looking down on people better born than any Boyle that ever was—good-looking, and well-mannered, and pleasant! Ah, it's a pity my poor father wasn't living; he'd give you a fine talking to."

"I am tired of it all," said Berna, for once breaking silence. "Why should we associate with the Muirs? why should I, at all events, be compelled to meet them on equal terms?"

"O, indeed! We'll have to try and get you an invitation from the Queen. Nobody lower, I suppose, seems to you good enough to speak to. If I approve of people, that is enough for you. I had to bear enough from your father, without putting up with any nonsense from you."

"I will stay in my room, then," declared Berna.

"Do. I am not aware that any one is so anxious for your society as to want to drag you out of it. Gorman Muir and myself can contrive, I make no doubt, to pass a quarter of an hour, or even more, without your help."

But Mr. Gorman Muir did not seem disposed

to try the experiment. For a time his visits ceased altogether, and when he did come, it was but to sing Miss Garnsey's praises. He rode with her, he hunted with her, he walked with her, he drove with her. He went to balls, and picnics, and flower-shows, and concerts in company with Mr. Garnsey and his daughter; he was always at Beechfield, so said local gossip. He was coining money, added the same reliable authority. Mr. Garnsey had given his consent, and the wedding clothes were ordered.

"Now you see what you've done," said Mrs. Boyle to her daughter; "driven away one who wanted to befriend us, and who, as I may say, adored me—yes, you may well put your hand to your head; I wonder a judgment does not fall on you for your conduct. They're all gone down together to the salt water. Mr. Garnsey has taken a house at Donaghadee, and young Muir's never but there."

Those were awful days for Berna. Though she would not confess it to herself, a very demon of jealousy was rending her heart. She would not

marry Gorman herself, but she could not bear that he should marry any one else. What she went through about that time she never told. Night after night she lay sobbing till the dawn. In the morning, and at noon, and till the evening, she tried to accomplish some allotted task; but the work, or the book, or the pencil would drop from her tired fingers, and she would fall into weary reverie, from which sometimes even the sound of her mother's voice often failed to arouse her. At these times she thought but of Gorman, forgetting Mr. Muir; then Mr. Muir would come in, and she could remember nothing save the fact that he was abhorrent to her, and that he called Gorman son.

It was a Sunday morning in early June when Mrs. Boyle called up to Berna to know if she meant to be all day dressing herself.

"I would rather not go to church, mamma," said that young lady; "I am tired."

"Well, I don't know what it's with, then," answered the widow, who, having long previously judiciously curtailed her mourning, now appeared

with something white and gauzy around her neck, giving a premonitory hint of what might further be expected in the way of change. "You're getting idler and idler; it's my belief you'll be too lazy to live after a while, and that you'll die because you can't bear the trouble of keeping about. As for not coming with me to church, though, make no mistake; I'm not going alone, and I am not going to stay away. I wonder if you never give the next world a thought, and you so obstinate and unfeeling in this. I'll be in my place, if only to show the people it's nothing to me what Mr. Gorman Muir chooses to do or leave undone."

Without answering a word, Berna turned into her own little bedchamber, put on her mantle and bonnet, and then stood thoughtfully looking at her gloves.

Ruth was in the room, and suspended her employment to glance at the pale, weary face reflected in the glass. "Miss Berna dear, you're not fit to go. Let me try what I can do with the mistress, and—"

"It is of no use," interrupted the girl. Then, covering her face with her hands, she burst into tears. "O, I cannot, cannot bear much more!" she sobbed.

"Am I to be kept waiting all day?" cried Mrs. Boyle at this juncture.

"I am coming, mamma," answered Berna; and she went.

It was a perfect day; the grass was growing thick in the meadows; lambs were calling to their mothers; a mare with a colt by her side was looking over a gate; families were wending their way to meeting, dressed in their best clothes—the men, as became the lords of creation, walking in advance of their wives, daughters, and sisters, who, carrying Bibles wrapped in clean white handkerchiefs, kept a little behind, discoursing, as Mr. Muir would have said, "about such things as they could understand." Quite at their leisure, the Presbyterians "dandered" along. They had plenty of time, for their public worship did not begin till half an hour after the church bell stopped. Noon was an

excellent time for persons forced to come from long distances to settle down in their pews ; a far better time than that at which the sexton ceased reminding the by-law-established congregation they should be toiling up the hill.

“ Make haste ! we shall be all behind,” said Mrs. Boyle, hurrying along with short, tripping steps. “ I never saw such a girl ! Not an atom of life or activity about you.”

“ Mamma, I cannot walk so fast,” ventured Berna. “ I really am not well.”

“ You’d be well enough if it wasn’t for your sinful temper,” answered Mrs. Boyle, pausing by the graveyard gate for her daughter, who panted painfully up the incline.

CHAPTER XIII.

SHORT as was the space which intervened between the gate of the graveyard and the church porch, Mrs. Boyle, while traversing it, contrived to smooth those feathers her "headstrong girl" had ruffled.

With mincing steps she pursued the path leading westward, preening herself like some conceited pigeon as she went, and adding such small touches to bows, net, crape, and cuffs as experience had taught her might advantageously be bestowed after a hurried walk and unavailing remonstrances with a young person "little better nor a natural."

"All abloom," the widow crossed the vestibule and sidled up the aisle, a complete contrast to Berna, who, so the few who were there to see afterwards averred, followed her mother "pale as death." Even the lily tints had faded out of her cheeks, leaving a deathlier white still.

One swift glance told Mrs. Boyle there was no man in the church worth setting her cap at. Mr. Garnsey was absent, Mr. Gorman Muir not present. The only churchwarden on view chanced to be married; while Mr. Crommles was a widower of such long standing that most women, young and old, tender blossoms and ancients of days, considered it a mere waste of time to encompass that clerical citadel.

“For all there’s to see,” considered the widow, “we might as well have stayed at home;” but before she had settled herself two strangers, lady and gentleman, were ushered into the rector’s pew.

The lady wore the “neatest” bonnet, the widow thought, she ever beheld; while her mantle had a “French cut about it” that struck Mrs. Boyle as peculiarly fascinating, and induced the reflection that if “Berna owned a bit of an eye for such things, she might have taken the pattern off in her head.”

Indeed a lovely day! Through the open windows pleasant airs laden with sweet scents wan-

dered into the church. Outside, the birds were singing and leaves dancing in the sunshine; a gentle wind stirred the grass growing above the quiet dead. There was a great silence, broken only by the voice of Mr. Crommles and the murmured responses of the congregation; even the clerk's sonorous "Amens" were more subdued than usual. Every now and then the whole scene seemed to fade away from Berna's sight, while the words of the rector sounded further and further away; portions of the service eluded her ear altogether; the singing sounded like a confused noise, heard as if coming from some remote distance. Over and over she tried to rouse herself, to shake herself into attention; but in a few minutes afterwards she found her mind again slipping away, utterly eluding her will. As in a dream, she listened to the Lessons; mechanically she stood, and knelt, and sat, till at last, just as Mr. Crommles was approaching the end of his sermon, every object seemed to reel round, and she had to clutch the front of the pew to save herself from falling.

“ I shall faint if I do not go out,” thought the girl; and rising, somehow she groped her way into the aisle, and blindly, but with the instinct of self-preservation strong upon her, managed to get into the open air and reach a square tomb, on which she sank, utterly exhausted.

“ Good heavens! what is the matter, Miss Boyle?” exclaimed Gorman Muir.

Having come into church late, he had modestly taken a seat close by the door; and he was at Berna’s side sooner than the sexton, who answered,

“ She’s not fit to tell you. Keep up her head while I go for a drop of water. Don’t be scared; it’s only a sort of a swoond. There, didn’t I tell you?” he added, running back from the vestry. “ You’re better now, miss dear, aren’t you? Take a sup of this. Don’t try to hold the glass; I’ll keep a grip of it. You’re trembling like a leaf. When she’s fit to move, you’d best help her round to my house. She can sit there a while; and I’ll tell the mother not to be fretting herself. You’re getting on bravely

now, aren't you? Don't stir yet till you feel steady on your feet. That's right, Mr. Muir; she'll be best wanting her bonnet. Now I must go; Mr. Crommles will be near done by this time. See, I'll just leave the tumbler beside you, case it's wanted again; and mind you take her round to the house; the people'll soon be passing here. Don't refuse his arm, miss; you'll never be able to walk your lone. That's better. You're mighty tottery still. See the pride of her!" thought the sexton to himself, as he hurried back into the church. "She can't thole touching the man's coat-sleeve. Faith, and I don't blame her; though, if it comes to that, her own mother's no great things either."

As for Gorman, he paced by Berna's side in a very agony. What if his father's prophecy should prove true—what if the girl were to die!

Around lay those who had faded out of existence as young as she. Death did not spare, love could not save, them; why should death spare her? Why should his own love avail, when the tears of parents, the prayers of husbands, had

in other cases failed to avert the doom? He pressed his right arm to his breast; he clenched his left hand in impotent despair; he lifted his eyes to the clear blue sky, and silently murmured a petition that she might live. He could not speak a word to her; his very heart seemed to stand still with dread. Thus among the graves and through the little rustic gate they moved in utter silence.

Not a human being was about; two large white goats—grazing on the little patch of common land in front of the few cottages, in one of which the sexton lived—turned and stared at them. Without ceremony, Gordon lifted the latch and opened the door.

The kitchen was empty. Beside a smouldering turf fire stood an old-fashioned easy-chair. Gorman placed Berna in it, and then, leaning against the mantelshelf, remained looking at the girl, who had sunk back in the seat and closed her eyes. After a minute she roused herself again.

“Do not let me keep you here,” she said.

“Why are you so cruel to me?” he asked, with the quick revulsion of feeling common to untrained and passionate natures. “You would speak more kindly to a dog than you do to me, and yet what in the wide world is there I would not do for you? Why will you go on this way, breaking my heart? Why don’t you give me a chance of winning your love? If I were the very worst and lowest of God’s creatures you could not treat me more scornfully. Only tell me how I can please you—only set me some task, I do not care how hard—only treat me even as a brother, a friend—and—”

“I wish you would go,” she murmured.

With an angry gesture he flung out of the cabin, and stood with his outward gaze wandering over the quiet landscape, though he really saw nothing but Berna. While they were crossing the graveyard he would have died for her. Now, in his fury, he felt as though he could have killed her. For the time being he was desperate. An ungovernable rage took possession of him, and a noise as of many waters was surging in his

ears. He could not see sky or earth for a mist of tears. Many demons rent him so sore he could have cried aloud with pain ; but at last they departed from out his soul, and he turned and reëntered the house.

“ Shall I fetch your mother ? ” he asked ; and his voice was hoarse by reason of the struggle in which he had been engaged.

“ No, thank you,” she answered wearily.
“ But if *you* would only go ! ”

“ Don’t be afraid ; I’m going,” he retorted, with difficulty restraining another paroxysm of rage. “ I curse myself for having given you the chance of bidding me leave you twice. No woman ever before said to me ‘ Go ! ’—perhaps that is the reason I never cared to stop with any woman till I saw you ! O my God ! ” he added vehemently, “ what I would not give to know how to melt the ice of your heart ! It does not matter to you, I suppose, that you are destroying everything that is good in me. I hate my life ; I hate myself ; I hate the very sunshine ! But there, what is the use of talking ? What I have to bear I must bear.

It was a bad night's work for me when I came upon you standing like a spectre in the shadows of that summer night. I would have been away from here, long enough ago, if it had not been for you. No; don't tell me to leave you again; I am going. Upon my soul, I am;" and then, throwing himself upon his knees beside her, he kissed Berna's gloved hand over and over again. "My cruel love!" he cried. "My cruel, cruel love! How can you be so cold to a man whose heart beats only for you? No; stay where you are," he added, as the girl attempted to rise. "What a wretch I am, and you ill! Forgive me!" and he left the cottage as Mrs. Boyle, all flutter and excitement, advanced towards it.

"Why, Mr. Gorman, who'd have dreamt of seeing you here?" she exclaimed. "I thought you were in Donaghadee, no less. What's wrong with Berna?"

"I do not know, Mrs. Boyle," answered the young man; "she seems very ill."

"There's no end to my troubles," exclaimed the widow; "first one thing and then another.

O, it is here you are, is it?" she added, passing into the cabin, followed by Gorman. "A fine fright I've had over you. I'm sure, when I turned my head, wondering what the clerk and Mr. Crommles were staring at our pew for, and saw you were gone, a child might have knocked me down. I never was one to make a fuss for a disturbance, so I sat on till I could contain myself no longer, and then, after I'd been hunting all over the neighbourhood for you, the old man came out and told me your were here, resting yourself. Pity you hadn't stopped at home if you didn't feel well. How I'm to get you back there, goodness only knows."

"Mrs. Miller has a car. She will lend it to me, I know," whispered Gorman eagerly.

"You're too kind altogether," said Mrs. Boyle. "I can never thank you enough for your goodness. What's that you're saying, Berna?—you'll walk! Indeed, and you'll do no such thing—at least, I know I'm not going to walk with you. I thought," turning with an engaging simper to Gorman, "we'd never get to church at

all. She dragged along just like some rheumatic old woman. I'm sure I hope if ever I live long enough to get into years I'll be different from her. She hasn't a bit of life or activity. As Miss Sheill was only saying the last time I saw her, anybody might think I was the girl in my first teens, and Berna some staid grandmother."

"Miss Sheill was correct so far as you are concerned," remarked Gorman, anxious, even at the expense of truth, to make matters a little pleasanter. "Perhaps I had better be seeing about that car."

He did not remain away long. At the foot of the hill he met a lad, who gladly undertook to carry his message; while he, nothing loth, retraced the way he had so lately come.

Short as was the time, he saw Berna had been crying. "And she won't marry me, who would never speak an unkind word to her," he thought bitterly.

"Had you not better come out into the air, Mrs. Boyle?" he asked; "you seem to find it warm here;" and his glance sought Berna's face,

in hopes that she might thank him with her eyes. But the girl would not look at him. He was resolute, however, to keep Mrs. Boyle away from her daughter. He showed her the goats, he walked with that lady up and down over the grass, he spoke of the prospect, he flattered and humoured her, and "kept the fun going," till at last his messenger returned to state,

"Mrs. Miller said he might have the car and welcome ; and her son was yoking the horse."

CHAPTER XIV.

It was one evening towards the end of the same week ; Berna lay on a sofa in her own little room, a plaid shawl thrown over her feet, one thin white hand contrasting with the blackness of her mourning dress, her eyes closed, her mouth a little compressed, her forehead drawn into a pucker. Through the open window roses thrust in their heads, filling the room with perfume ; dimity curtains stirred gently as the light breeze swept past them ; swallows were darting hither and thither ; on a stool placed near the sofa Ruth sat darning stockings. Not a sound disturbed the stillness ; even the music of the little stream was hushed. The water was so low it scarcely murmured as it trickled slowly over the pebbles, and wound a languid course to the sea.

“ Are you in any pain, my poor lamb ? ” asked

Ruth at length, laying down her work and looking wistfully at the girl she loved so truly.

Berna opened her eyes, and, sighing heavily, answered,

“No, nurse ; only tired.”

“Do you not think you feel any better ?”

“I am not ill ; only tired.”

“Do you know what the doctor asked your mother when he was here to-day ?”

“No. What was it ?”

“Whether you had anything on your mind.”

“O !”

“And she asked, what would a girl of your age have on her mind ?”

“Yes, and he—”

“Said that was nonsense ; that you were eighteen years of age ; that he could find no sign of disease about you ; and that he felt morally certain you were fretting, or in trouble of some sort.”

“What did mamma say ?”

“The outcome of it all was she couldn’t think of a mortal thing that ailed you, without it was

having lost your father; and the doctor he asked how long he had been dead, and then he shook his head, and put it plain—were you in love?”

The brilliant colour of old dyed Berna's cheeks crimson for a moment; but the next faded away, leaving her pale as death. “Go on, nurse,” she entreated.

“‘Love, indeed!’ says the mistress; ‘time enough for all that this many’s the day! No; it’s just her oddity and contrariness. Love! my word, that is a fine notion! We’ll have the babies in arms thinking about love next. You’re wrong this time, doctor; while you were about it, I wonder you didn’t make some likelier guess than that.’

‘Maybe I’m wrong,’ he said; ‘but I don’t think I am.’

‘That’s the very thing you are, though,’ she made answer.

‘Well, well,’ returns the old man; ‘well, well, well—’”

“And that was all, nurse?”

“All, except that you’re to have the best of

good living, and change of some sort as soon as you get up your strength a bit ; and O, my dear, dear child, won't you speak to your poor old nurse and tell her something of what's in your mind ? Sure it's better to be living than dead, to be happy than proud. If you're fond of him—and I know you are—why won't you make some sign ? Any one with a grain of sense could see he fairly worships the ground you walk on. It's not the match I wanted for you. It's a great come down, I know. Still, he has good people belonging to him on his mother's side, and his uncle gave him the best of education ; and he has gentleman's ways with him, and there's many a thing against you marrying as you ought. Great ladies before now—ay, even grander ladies than Sir Herbert Boyle's wife ; and, as you know, she's an earl's daughter—have chosen husbands scarce their equals by a long way, and lived content with them all their lives—more content than if they'd been in kings' palaces. It's not exactly a man or a woman's relations, Miss Berna, but the man or the woman's self ; and so, if you have a fancy for

Mr. Gorman Muir—and I know you had from the first—what would hinder you saying a pleasant word to him now and again? You needn't say much. Starving folk are thankful for crumbs, and if there was anybody starving for a kind look, it's young Mr. Muir."

"He is not likely to get kind looks or pleasant words from me," answered Berna, throwing up her right arm and resting her head upon it. "You are wrong, nurse. All I want is to be left in peace, to live my own life and face my own fate as I must face it. I need rest, and I can't get it while strangers are coming to the house. I want fresh air, and there is no place round all this neighbourhood I can be sure of not meeting him. It is that which has laid me up," went on the girl, raising herself on her elbow, and looking with longing eyes beyond the roses and the shrubs to the calm evening glory which flooded the sky. "O, if you knew the quiet hand those long lonely walks used to seem to lay on my unquiet heart, you would understand. I am ill now just as a prisoner might be ill who even in

his cell scarcely ever was so blessed as to be quite alone."

Ruth rose. She smoothed the pillows; she passed a gentle though hard hand across the broad white forehead. "Lie down, dear, lie down," she said; "I am only a poor ignorant woman; I never had much learning. I am not able to speak to you as I'd wish to speak, but I think I understand. Still, Miss Berna, maybe it might be well for you to consider. You can't go on as you are doing for ever. You've no chance of visiting and seeing the world like other young ladies. You've shut the door between yourself and the master's grandmother. Who have you got to look to if you don't look after yourself? And here's a lover only waiting the smallest sign from you to give you a house of your own and a husband who would just dote upon you."

Berna laughed a little bitterly. "Was not there some one," she asked, "that said, 'Not a Boyle belonging to me but would turn in their graves,' if I took up with Gorman Muir? 'That he was not a gentleman, that he was a worse man

than his father,' and a great many more things of the same sort? If you have changed your ideas, I have not, Ruth."

"But I didn't know anything about him then, miss. It was nothing but the common talk I repeated, and I don't suppose anybody was much better acquainted with him than myself. I have never met any young man civiler spoken or better behaved; and I hear he's making a lot of money, and is free with it as free can be. And he's kind, I'm sure. He was riding along the road the other day in front of me, and there was a poor old grandmother carrying a child and a heavy basket. The creature looked fit to drop. Mr. Gorman pulls up. 'Which shall I take?' he says, as pleasant as you please. 'I can't manage both basket and child, but hand me up which you like.' Your own father, dear, couldn't have spoke kinder, or put his arm more natural-like round the boy."

"I never said he was not kind, Ruth; he may be, for all I know, though he is Mr. Muir's son."

"Well, miss, a child mostly can't choose its parents."

“That is very true ; but at least I can choose not to have Mr. Muir for a father-in-law. I would not marry into that family—no, not if the son had fifty thousand a year.”

“If that’s so,” said Ruth, smoothing a stocking on her lap, “it’s a pity he does not speak and be done with it.”

“Do you suppose he has not spoken, then ?” said the girl, again raising herself.

“I didn’t know. Has he ever—”

“Over and over again, Ruth. And I am so tired of it all, of saying ‘No, no, no—no.’ He won’t take ‘No.’ I can’t go across the threshold without meeting him. I should be well enough if he would only let me alone—if he would believe what I tell him. I must do something, nurse ; but I do not know how to do it. If I could get away—some place ever so far away, where I should never see or hear of him again, you cannot imagine what a comfort it would be.”

“And your eyes are full of tears as you say that. O child dear, consider whether you are not making a mistake. There’s Miss Garnsey,

now, would marry him to-morrow; and they do say Mr. Garnsey's on for the match himself; and why couldn't you give him a chance to see if it was just impossible you might change your notion? Pride's very well, but it is cold comfort for an aching heart. In my poor way I was proud once myself; and I know I have lain from night to morning crying for the smile I'd once turned away from. I never told you, Miss Berna, about Pat Harrigan. If we're very fond of anybody, it comes hard to talk about them; but I feel, this evening, as if I wouldn't mind so much telling you why I never married—never cared to look at any man, except the one—”

“Tell me, nurse,” said Berna softly.

Ruth paused a moment before she began, and there came across her furrowed face and her homely features a light, as if from some far distance the sunshine of youth was shining full upon one no longer young or comely. “It was at Carrick May fair I first saw him. My father was set against my going, but he gave way at last, and me and my cousin Rose started together. Pat

came up to us when we were buying gingerbread-nuts at one of the stalls. I can see him now. He was straight as a dart, and his face was brown with being out in the weather, and he had soft kind eyes; and he singled us girls out. He followed us wherever we went; and when we started to walk home again, nothing would serve him but that he must put us a piece of the road. He walked on and on, till at last I made him turn, saying my father would be angry; and then Rose and I made haste home, laughing and talking as we went, she saying the young man was after me, and I saying it was her he was after; but I knew better all the time. All that summer he was, on and off, over at Ballynure, where we had a bit of a farm. We were comfortably off; my father worked as a day labourer, and my mother and the rest of us wrought about the land; and we held our heads a trifle high because we owed nobody anything, and had a few pounds in an old worsted stocking hidden away under the thatch.

“Maybe that was the reason I wouldn’t have

anything to say to Pat, though I knew I liked him well. He couldn't get a kind look from me, and I used to say hard things till my father got cross, and my mother said, 'I don't know what you want, girl. There's only one thing against him, and that's his religion.' 'And that he has the old woman to keep, and little to keep her with,' I'd make answer. And then my mother would get more vexed still, because she didn't like me to seem to be grudging the poor widow her bite and sup—and Pat was the last she had brought up respected and respectable. He was only a fisherman, Pat; and he couldn't earn much—what with the nets getting torn, and there being so many to share what profits were made. Sometimes when we met I'd scarce speak to him; when he was away I thought I'd give the world to have him near; when he was at hand I tormented him; and yet, Miss Berna, all the time I knew well I cared for nobody else—that I liked his little finger better than any other man's whole body. We had a quarrel once, and my heart felt breaking. He kept

away for a month, and then it all began over again. I said he'd best stop away—that I didn't want him—that I'd never marry a Catholic or live with any man's mother. I was a hard wretch. I think I see the strained, sorrowful face with which he turned away without a word. He had not got many perches from the door before he came back: 'I can't desert my mother for you, Ruth; and I won't give up my religion; but there's nothing a man may do for a woman I wouldn't try to do for you, my foolish young love.'"

"Ah! my poor Ruth," murmured Berna; and there was a moment's silence in the room.

"We had just got in our harvest, when one day a cart stopped at the end of the loanin', and a woman came up to the house. It was his mother. I had never seen her before. She was worn and wasted and had seen a lot of trouble, and the gentle face of her, and something like tears in her voice, cut me to the heart. She said she wanted so bad to see me, and she had got a

friend to give her a sail over in his cart—that is the way they talk there, with always living beside the sea. She couldn't bear to see her son fretting as he was, and she talked to me and my mother and my father, and she kissed me when she went away, and hoped I'd make Pat a good wife some day. 'For he's better than rich: he's dutiful and brave, and he loves you as men don't often love.' And so I sent him a word of comfort, but I wouldn't say much, and I used to go down sometimes to see her when I knew he was away. I don't know what made me like that, for I wasn't stiff or nasty to anybody but the man who was beyond all men to me—"

"Nurse, it hurts you to talk; don't tell me any more."

"There's not much more to tell, dear; but it is enough. It was a rough winter. It was a very bad winter for the poor fishermen, and many a time when the wind has been shrieking and swirling round the house, I have lain and shivered, wondering if Pat was down about the Gobbins, and thinking about the three hundred fathoms of

wild dark water rushing against the rocks that rise so sheer down there.

“There came one very bad night; the storm seemed to take our house in its hand, intending to dash it to pieces—a perfect tempest roared across the lonely open country lying up on the top of the hills. For hours I could get no sleep; I trembled till the bed shook under me, and I vowed I’d never speak unkind to Pat again. At last I dropped off, and then I awoke sudden with the sound of some one speaking in my ear. I saw Pat, miss, I saw him plain. All the room was pitch dark, save one corner that had a strange sort of light, such as I never saw on earth. It was not of the sun or the moon or the stars, and from out of that Pat was looking at me mournfully. ‘Good-bye, Ruth; good-bye,’ he said; and the voice grew fainter and fainter, and he faded and faded away, and there was darkness all around me, and I lay shaking with the fright.

“The next morning, at the first streak of day, I started, without my breakfast, and walked on till I got to Carrick. I spoke to nobody as I

went through the town, and nobody spoke to me : at last I got to the house where his mother lived. The door was shut, but I pulled the string and opened the latch and went in. She was sitting with some of the neighbours round her, and most of them were crying. *Then I knew.* I couldn't ask a question, but after a while I heard that some vessel was in distress, and not a man would go to her. They thought it was certain death, and they had their wives and their families. Then an old gentleman, whose son was on board, came among them, and, with his white hair streaming and the tears running down his face, offered them money if they would at least try to launch a boat. My Pat was there. He was standing on the White Quay, with the waves sweeping over it. 'I'll not sell my life,' he said, 'but I'll give it;' and he jumped into the boat, and some others followed him, and they did save the crew. But when the boat came back it was without Pat. All was over, the world had ended for me ! His mother and me were sitting together, talking low, when some one opened the door

softly, and, looking at us, lifted his hand and said 'Hush!' Then we knew they had got him, got all that would ever come home again of my handsome, tender lover. They laid him on the bed : there was a sort of wistful smile on his lips, and through the half-closed lids I could see the colour of the eyes that might never again look at me. I think that's all, Miss Berna."

The girl's thin hand sought that of the woman, there was not a word more spoken, but they stayed there utterly still, while the evening glory departed, and the mystical twilight crept on.

CHAPTER XV.

“DEAR MRS. VINCE,—Though *Mister* Vince, as people call him now he’s got up so high in the world, wouldn’t care if he saw his own lying dead in the street, I think, after all the fuss you drove with Berna—making her out a nonsuch, and setting her against her own mother—you’ll feel sorry for your neglect when you hear the doctor says the girl is as bad as bad can be. She’s to be kept up—I’m only telling you his very words—and live on the fat of the land, and have change, and good society, and red wine, and calf’s-foot jelly; and where one of these things is to be got out of my income, perhaps you know—I’m sure I don’t. If it was myself, I’d fade away like a leaf before one of you should be troubled; but in case anything happened to Berna, I’d never hear the last of it. So now I’ve told you just what’s going on, you can please yourself; only, never blame me

afterwards for keeping you in the dark. It's true enough that some of us are born to trouble as the sparks fly upwards; I've had my share, anyhow. I don't know what you would best like me to say I am; so I'll conclude with only my name,

“MILLY BOYLE.”

Mrs. Vince happened to be alone when this letter was handed to her. She read it twice through, and after audibly remarking, “Then she can write; I always fancied she was unable to do so,” applied a match to the paper, and let it smoulder away to the last inch.

“She must be an idiot,” considered the wife of Richard Charles Vince, Esq., contemplating the blackened remains of Mrs. Boyle's extraordinary epistle. “No woman in her senses would run the chance of having all help withdrawn. She little knows the trouble I have had to induce my husband to continue the income he does allow her. I will drive over and see what underlies this ridiculous rambling effusion. If the poor girl is ill, of course she must be seen to.”

It was in accordance with this decision that

when, "after having had no more dinner than would content a fly," Mrs. Boyle was wandering about the garden, protecting her "clear complexion" from injury by means of a parasol, and speculating what could have become of Gorman, and whether he would call that day, she "suddenly lifted her eyes" and beheld a carriage at the gate.

"I thought that would fetch her," she muttered, with a triumphant little gasp. "Your husband," she mentally added, "is not the only clever one of the Vince family, my lady! This is a surprise!" she said aloud, advancing to meet Richard's wife. "I never expected to see you at Clear Stream again. Why, it must be near upon a year since you were out before. But there, to be sure, of course you are always visiting, and haven't leisure to be thinking whether your poor relations are living or dead."

"How is your daughter?" asked Mrs. Vince, determinedly cutting across this tirade.

"About the same; if anything, worse."

"What is the matter with her?"

“ Goodness only knows—I don’t. It’s a sort of perishing from the root. She never had much heart or spirit ; but she was wild, just out of her mind with tricks and diversion when you saw her, in comparison to what she is now. My life is fairly fretted out of me—as if there wasn’t trouble and expense enough before, without her taking it into her head to get ill ! If ever a woman was born unlucky, that woman’s me—not a farthing’s-worth of satisfaction with husband or child, or husband’s friends, or my own.”

“ Let us go into the house,” suggested Mrs. Vince. “ I have a few words I wish to say to you quietly.”

“ Well, well, you can be quiet as you like. If it wasn’t for a neighbour sometimes looks in to pass the time of day, we might as well be in the graveyard. Quiet ! If that’s what you want, you could not have come to a better place. But aren’t you going to take a look at Berna ?”

“ Presently—not just yet ;” and Mrs. Vince shut the sitting-room door, and, without being invited, took a seat.

"I wish to have an understanding with you, Mrs. Boyle," she said.

"There oughtn't to be any hardship about that," answered the widow bravely, though Mrs. Vince's manner made her uncomfortable. "There never was anybody easier understood than myself."

"Then I had better come to the point at once. Are you not afraid of goading my husband into cutting himself adrift from you altogether?"

"He can do about that as he likes. There is not a creature knows him but is aware it's shame, instead of justice, makes him give me the pittance he does."

"May I ask what you mean by justice? Is Mr. Vince bound, either in law or in honour, to allow you one shilling?"

"He wouldn't pay a single sixpence, if he could help it."

"You will find, I think, he very soon will help it, if you continue to talk about him as you do. He hears in all directions that you say he is cruel and stingy."

“ So he is.”

“ That he has no feeling for you or your daughter.”

“ Neither he has.”

“ That he owes his fortune entirely to your father.”

“ Well, and doesn't he ?”

“ That while he was glad enough to go to Boyle Court when you were rich, he turns his back upon you now you are poor.”

“ I suppose you are not going to say he has ever set foot across this threshold since he drove me into banishment, away from all my friends. O dear ! Esau's not the only one sold his birth-right for a mess of pottage.”

“ You had better, then, take back your birth-right. Do what you like, say what you like, live where you like—only without help from him. It is absurd to suppose he will continue to pay you the money he does, if you go round the country vilifying a man who has acted most generously by you.”

“ As all are aware, I'm poor enough, and I'm

lonely enough ; so you are at liberty to say what you like to me."

"I have no wish to be hard upon you," answered Mrs. Vince, recovering from her sudden gust of passion. "My husband is in London at present, and on his return I shall say nothing about your letter ; I would not vex him by the mention of such ingratitude ; and for your daughter's sake I am willing to give you another chance. I tell you fairly, however, that I am almost weary of standing between you and the consequences of your own folly ; and should I hear again that you have spoken of my husband in the same terms as hitherto, I shall leave him to act towards you as he may think best."

"I am sure *I* have said nothing ; but you can't stop people's tongues."

"Perhaps not ; but we can stop paying your rent and forty pounds a year."

"It's scarce becoming of you, Mrs. Vince, who owe the very dress you've on your back to my family, to talk to me as you are doing."

“Good heavens ! this woman is enough to drive any one mad !” exclaimed Mrs. Vince.

“There was not much madness about you,” retorted Mrs. Boyle, “when you went to Richard Vince to ask him to take you as housekeeper.”

“*When I what ?*”

“I am sure I spoke plain enough : when you went and said, didn’t he think you’d make him a first-rate housekeeper ?”

“Mrs. Boyle, you cannot really be in your senses.”

“A while ago it was you was going out of your mind. Right or wrong, that’s the story’s going about the world.”

“It is an absolute falsehood.”

“Well, well, you ought to know best. At any rate, it is in everybody’s mouth, and nobody’s likely to believe to the contrary now. It is an old saying, that ‘a lie travels round the world while truth is putting on his boots ;’ and you’ll have a good deal of trouble convincing the world you think so much of that you didn’t make a lucky bid for my cousin. Maybe you might have done

just as well to have made a friend of me. My word would have gone a long way; for even strangers always said, 'If there's one in the North you can depend on, that one is Milly Vince.' However, we'll see. You're mighty well up in life now; but 'it's a high tree has no top;' and little as you account me at this minute, maybe the day'll come you will wish you had thought Mrs. Boyle worth a civil word."

"When was I otherwise than civil to you?"

"O, that's all very fine! As I was saying to a person only a few days back—"

"I do not wish to hear what you said to any one."

"Ah! perhaps you'll be of a different opinion when you see me as grand as yourself, with a fine handsome man for husband, who won't sit still and know his wife put upon."

Mrs. Vince's heart leapt for joy.

"No human being, Mrs. Boyle," she said, "will be more rejoiced to see you married again than myself."

“I am glad to hear it. You won’t have long to wait for that gratification.”

“And what will become of your daughter?”

“She’ll always be welcome to share of whatever home I have; and it’s only she prevents me having one to-morrow. She’s that contrary it makes a man half afraid to come to the house. Of course, he thinks to himself, if a girl’s so unpleasant to him before marriage, what will she be after?”

“A most natural reflection. And so Berna does not take kindly to the idea of your second union?”

“Kindly! You should have seen the look on her face the first day I put a scrap of white round my throat; and it’s cruel to expect a woman, still young like myself, especially with such a complexion and figure, to stop in weeds till all my chances are over! And she has a way of sitting when we are all laughing and making merry, without speaking a word or even encouraging us by a smile.”

“That must be very trying.”

“You see, her father was all the world to her. Neither of them ever thought about *me*. I am sure, my very heart seems full to breaking when I think of the way I was treated among them all. And she never considers what would have become of her if I hadn’t thrown myself away on Ulick Boyle. When I am sitting alone, I often wonder Berna’s conscience does not smite her—if she ever considers her ingratitude to the best of mothers.”

“Certainly my husband’s cousin is a lunatic,” decided Mrs. Vince; but she only said,

“Perhaps, then, if I could persuade your daughter to come to me for a little while, it might make matters easier for you both.”

“You’ll not get her to go. You can try, but you’ll see. Many a one has striven to seduce my girl away from me, but they have all failed. She knows who is her best friend. There was the Dowager, for example, would have clothed her in purple and fine linen, and offered her sumptuous fare every day the sun rose—five meals a day, too—and wild horses couldn’t drag her to the old woman.”

“But, perhaps, as she is so ill—”

“You can try. She is welcome to go, for me. I never was one to consider myself, and I am just as content and happy alone as if I was among thousands. My father always said, ‘Milly’s the happy chick of the family. Set her down where you will, she’ll pick a grain of content.’ I take after him in that. When he had finished his second tumbler of punch he was the life and soul of the company. Ah! there’s few like him—the cheerful ways he had with him! You wouldn’t think Richard Vince was a drop’s blood to one of us.”

“The gentleman you are thinking of marrying resides in this neighbourhood?” suggested Mrs. Vince.

“Well, he does, and he doesn’t, if you can understand what I mean. It’s like the old riddle my father used to puzzle us children with. Till it was explained, people used to consider it a wonderful mystery. I suppose you never heard this; it’ll do to make sport among your own young ones: ‘There’s a man in New Row, and

he's Nott in New Row. He's Nott alive, and he's not dead. But he lives in New Row, and he sells thread.'"

"Crazier than any poor demented witch," thought Mrs. Vince.

"Well, as I was saying," proceeded Mrs. Boyle, "he didn't happen to be reared in these parts; but he was born here, and has friends here among the first in the land. You've heard, perhaps, of Mr. Garnsey, of Beechfield. He's hand and glove with him, and he keeps his hunters, and goes out with the harriers and stag-hounds, and he'll bring no disgrace upon Richard Charles Vince or yourself, big people as you think yourselves."

"The chief consideration, Mrs. Boyle, is, will he make you happy?"

"Happy! why, he's the best of good company; he can sing, and play, and dance. Wait till you see him, and you'll count me the lucky woman to have taken his fancy."

"I congratulate you most cordially."

"Yes, I thought you'd be pleased. That's

one thing I will say concerning those that come of good family, there's no grudging about them ; you've done well yourself, Mrs. Vince, but you wouldn't mind anybody else should do well too. I am glad I told you : it's off my mind, and when Richard comes back you can give him a hint how the land lies."

"That I certainly will. And now may I see your daughter?"

"And welcome ! She's fit enough to leave her room ; but she won't come in here for fear of meeting those she thinks herself above, though they're as good as any Boyle ever was. Maybe you could bring her to her senses. Just put it to her how low we've come down in the world, and how a match such as I have in view would be the making of us all. Go in alone ; I'd best stay out. She thinks a heap of you. Berna, here's a friend come to see you ;" and Mrs. Boyle, after making this announcement, shut the door of her daughter's room, across which Mrs. Vince walked with both hands extended.

"My poor, poor child !" she cried ; "what is

the matter with you? and who did you think the friend was? Don't tremble so, dear!" and she drew the girl's head down upon her bosom, and sat silent for a moment. Then, "I want to take you back with me to Craigvallen, my love," she went on; "your mother has given her consent, and I mean to nurse you myself. I know now why you wrote and asked me to stop away; but you were foolish, Berna, very foolish; don't be foolish again. Say you are willing to come with me."

"Willing!" repeated Berna. "*Thankful!* O Mrs. Vince—"

"Not another word," interrupted that lady. "I am going to call Ruth. The carriage is waiting. You can talk as much or as little as you please at Craigvallen. All I want is to get you there."

CHAPTER XVI.

MUCH perplexed in mind, Mr. Muir walked down the long avenue leading to Craigvallen House.

He had seen many fine places before ; but never previously one so well kept, or which bore so unmistakably the visible signs and tokens of wealth. The grass was like velvet ; the drive free from moss and weeds ; the shrubs were of the rarest ; even the trees seemed well cared for.

“ There is no standing still for money here,” thought the farmer. “ I begin to misdoubt me it’s a bad business altogether.” And he shook his head sorrowfully as he looked around.

Berna had been absent from Clear Stream for more than a fortnight, and during the course of that time a terrible light had broken on Mr. Muir. One day when he was up at Sunnyside looking at a recent purchase of Gorman’s, Miss Garnsey,

accompanied by no less than three dogs, turned in, ostensibly to see an animal whose praises young Muir had been chanting to her father.

“She’s come on the chance of finding Gorman,” decided the farmer; and he kept the lady sauntering about Sunnyside and Ardilaw for some time in hopes his son might return. But Gorman did not return. Of late he had been restless and unsettled; given, so said Peter Doey, to taking “queer notions,” absenting himself for days together without “rhyme or reason,” attending to his business only by fits and starts, and in many other ways throwing out bad feathers, and indicating the possibility of ere long going headlong to perdition.

It was the wild drop revealing itself, Mr. Muir decided. He had often meant to speak to Gorman on the subject; but Gorman was not a person to whom it always seemed easy to talk, and thus, so far, no explanation had been arrived at between the father and son.

“He is frequently from home now,” said Miss Garnsey, as she stood just where the Ensign

once stood, picking currants from the very same bush the farmer had found him regarding with such rapt attention.

“He has a heap on his mind,” answered Mr. Muir deprecatingly. “Dealing in horses is a business which needs a power of attention.”

“So it seems,” agreed the lady, with a laugh, the tone of which Mr. Muir did not quite like, accustomed though he was to Miss Garnsey’s many pleasant ways.

“The worst of it is, he can scarce call his time his own,” said the farmer.

“Then he has the less leisure for getting into mischief.”

“There are few steadier young men going than Gorman, Miss Garnsey.”

“I don’t suppose you know much about what he is.”

“I think I may allow myself to be a judge on that point; there’s not one bit of harm in the lad. I have no manner of fault to find with him, unless it is his restlessness. It’s rare for him to be in the same mind now two days together,”

went on Mr. Muir tentatively. "I did hope he was settling down and getting quite content."

"Did you?"

"But I don't suppose any man can be expected to do well till he has a wife of his own to work for. I would be real glad to see him happy with a fine young wife."

"Perhaps it won't be long before you do."

"Well, I have had a notion once or twice there was some thought of the kind."

"So have I."

"You don't think I am altogether wrong, then?"

"No; I am sure you are not."

"And it's not beyond possibility I could give a guess at her name."

"*I* could."

"And maybe you wouldn't mind mentioning it to me—in a whisper, you know," said Mr. Muir, with a smile he considered irresistible.

"There is no necessity to whisper about the matter, so far as I am aware. The young lady's name is—"

"Yes, miss, yes; you've no call to be shy with *me*."

"I am not at all shy with anybody, only perhaps you might like to defer the evil hour a little longer. Upon the whole, I doubt whether it is a match you will much care for."

"Now, you know there is nothing would pleasure me more."

"I should not have supposed that exactly."

"Ah, that is only your fun."

"Yes; it is only my fun. And so you really wish to know the lady's name?"

"I'd like well to hear it from your own lips. But perhaps I'm asking too much."

"Not at all. What do you say to—Boyle?" and Miss Garnsey's eyes sparkled with mischievous enjoyment.

"I deemed from the first you were joking."

"Joking! Where is the joke?"

"You don't think Gorman would look at a withered-up old woman like that, even if she was in her senses, which she is not, and had ten times the money she wants?"

“No ; I am not talking of the mother, but the daughter ;” and the merriment died out of Miss Garnsey’s eyes, and her face grew hard and defiant by reason of the jealous pain she was enduring.

“The daughter !” and Mr. Muir stopped in the middle of the garden-path as if turned to stone.

“Do you mean to say the idea never occurred to you ?” inquired Miss Garnsey.

“Never—never once. What would have made it occur to me ?”

“Why, he is always at the cottage.”

“Is that so ?”

“That is so ; and of course we both guess it is neither the widow nor the servant who constitutes the attraction.”

“You have dealt me a heavy blow this day, Miss Garnsey. Still, I would fain hope you are not altogether right in your conjecture.”

“I think you will find I am. Ask your son.”

“I am not so sure he might make me a very civil answer.”

“Having opened your eyes, Mr. Muir, I may as well go home now.”

“You leave a very troubled man behind you.”

“O, you will get reconciled ere long. There is no reason why it should matter much to *you*.”

“It matters everything to me. I wouldn’t for five hundred pounds—no, not for a thousand pounds—such a misfortune had come to pass. But he’ll get over it, he must get over it; there’s no sense in the affair. To think of throwing himself away in this manner!”

“He knows his own value best,” retorted Miss Garnsey. “Come, Bruce; hi! there, Jack. Good-bye, Mr. Muir; give my best wishes to the happy couple.”

“I’m d—d if I will!” thought Mr. Muir; but he made no audible answer, while he strode gloomily by Miss Garnsey’s side to the gate. Then, after he had watched her and the dogs down the hill, he paced along the back avenue till he came to the stump of an old tree, on which he seated himself to digest his chagrin.

There Doey, on his way to the yard for a

bridle, saw "the old man," and wondered what he was doing, "sitting a'most in the cart track." Mr. Muir did not speak when he passed by the first time, but as he returned said somewhat hoarsely,

"Peter!"

"Well, what do you want with Peter?"

"Wait a minute and I will tell you."

Mr. Doey, being good enough to comply, paused and listened for what might follow.

"Peter," began Mr. Muir, "you're an observant character, and you take notice of many a thing few might give you credit for, so I'm just going to put a plain question to you."

"What is it?"

"You have seen more of my son for a good while now than I have, and been about with him here and there."

"Well?"

"Did it ever come into your head he had a notion of anybody?"

"Is that all? In course it did."

"And could you give a guess who she is?"

“I could give a guess who she isn’t; though, upon my faith, I believe she might have had him any day almost this last six months, if she’d been wiser and known how to catch him when the other wouldn’t so much as look at him.”

“Who are you talking about?”

“Miss Garnsey. He’d have married her for spite, over and over again.”

“Whom did he want to spite?”

“O Mr. Muir, you’ve never been so blind as all that comes to, and you a knowledgeable man into the bargain? I wouldn’t have credited it; and the thing going on under your very nose!”

“Can’t you speak out, and tell me who it is you mean?”

“Well, this beats all! Who is it? Who would it be but Miss Boyle? If ever a young man was in desperation about a girl, that young man is Gorman Muir. It’s all along of her he’s neglecting his business, and going as fast as he knows how to Old Nick. It’s a sore pity, too; for there’s a mine of money in Sunnyside, if he’d give his mind to working it. Faith, women are

at the bottom of every bother in the world! Trouble began with Eve, and some Eve has been busy making more ever since. I wish there wasn't a woman on earth. If I hadn't worn and spent myself keeping things together, it's beyond me to conceive what would have become of us all long ago."

Mr. Muir rose, and, thrusting his hands deep in his pockets, said,

"And all the time, like a fool, I was thinking he had at last settled his mind to make up to Miss Garnsey."

"He might have her, and a fine fortune, too, for the asking," answered Peter; "and he'll never get the other one."

"Why wouldn't he get the other one? What would hinder him getting her?"

"Because she won't have him; that's why, Mr. Muir. How do I know that? Never mind; I do know it. Couldn't I see your face if it was reflected in a glass? and can't I see the way she's treating him by looking at your son's doings? He never did take to drink and wickedness and

idleness as long as he'd a hope she'd take him ; but she won't. She thinks herself far and away too good for that."

" Too good for him !" repeated the farmer, in hot wrath. " Do you dare to tell me that widow woman's daughter wouldn't be only too keen to jump at such a chance and it were offered to her ?"

" As for daring, Mr. Muir," retorted Peter, " I'm not afraid of you nor any other man, and I dare say just what I please. If you hadn't been so set upon your own plan, you'd have known what I know—that your son thinks the sun rises and sets for that girl, and that she has made up her mind to have no say whatever to him. I don't mean she doesn't like him. She can't be off liking him. Where's the woman wouldn't? But the pride of her has eaten all the love up."

" What's she got to be proud of? That's what I want to know," said Mr. Muir. " Is it her cracked old mother, or her grandfather, Sam Vince—a low dirty attorney, no decent man ever went to twice? Then we all know what Richard Vince sprang from—"

“That makes no sort of odds,” interrupted Doey, with irritating calmness. “What does it signify where the man sprang from, when we see what he has sprung into? He is as rich as he can be; he has a grand place; there is no house shut against him; he has married among the best of the land; his wife drives a pair of horses no nobleman in the county could beat; and when you’ve said all you can say about him, I am given to understand the Boyles are greater quality still. They are made welcome at the Court of the Queen itself; and as for the Lord-Lieutenant, he’s hand and glove with Sir Herbert and his wife. They never go through Dublin without dropping in at The Castle to pass the time of day, and take a friendly cup of tea.”

“And what about the Gormans of Clonmellin?” asked Mr. Muir.

“I have nothing to say against them, I’m sure; only you must mind this about Miss Boyle—if she’d have given up her mother she might have been blazing with diamonds and going about with feathers in her head; and maybe she can’t

forget all that. Anyway, I'm feared your son has a poor chance, and I'm sorry for it; for you'll see he'll never content himself here now."

To which pleasing remark Mr. Muir deigned no reply.

"Bad luck to him!" thought Doey as he climbed the hill. "After all the insight I gave, he had never the manners to say, 'Have you a mouth on you, Peter?' Well, well; I think he has got a nut to crack will try his teeth. There'll be a fine to-do between the pair when Gorman comes back again. I only hope it won't end in the young one giving us all the cut go-by."

Days passed, and still Gorman did not return. He wrote from Dublin, and the letter contained some vague hint, which Mr. Muir construed to mean it was possible his son might leave Ireland altogether. Then the iron entered into the farmer's soul.

"How'll I ever live without him?" he thought. "Why did he come back, if I'm to lose him now? He sha'n't go; no, if she's all he wants to be content, he must have her."

For twenty-four long hours he turned the matter wearily over in his mind; then he came to a decision he could do nothing unless Gorman confided in him fully and entirely. So far everything was mere conjecture. He did not know what had passed between the pair—"where the hitch had come."

"I have noticed for a while past," he wrote, "something has been wrong with you. Come back, and if it's in the power of man to help you, I'll do it."

"And meantime," he thought, after he had dropped his letter in the box, "I'll just step over to Craigvallen and ask how she is. That can't do any harm. I'll not go in, no matter how much they press me."

Mr. Muir's resolution was subjected to no such temptation. He saw only a stately butler, who said he "believed Miss Boyle was better. She had gone to Greenisland, with Mrs. Vince, for the benefit of sea-bathing."

CHAPTER XVII.

“You are very good; but it is all of no use. I have said everything man could say, and yet she is adamant.”

It was Gorman Muir who spoke, striding up and down the room he had furnished with some vague idea of proving even to himself he was not beyond the pale of civilised life. He never looked handsomer: his dark hair tossed back, his brown eyes flashing with a troubled light, his expression at once scornful and sorrowful, his head erect as though he were remonstrating against some terrible injustice—his whole attitude passionate, defiant, indignant. “If she could see him now!” thought his father, who sat quite still—his face pale, his lips compressed, his features set—a type of the not less intense and impulsive, but far more dangerous, side of Irish character.

The one man might have been swayed by argument or feeling; not so the other. The germ

of everything which has made the glory of her children—all the traits that have filled to overflowing the sad cup of Ireland's shame—were, unknown to himself, planted deep in the nature of Hewson Muir. He was made precisely of the same stuff as the men who, through starvation and death, held Derry till relief came; who, though their daily wage might have been counted by pence, refused "blood-money," even when the temptation came in the shape of a thousand pounds; who fought against "their natural enemies" at Fontenoy—fought for and with them on many a day since; done deeds bards might immortalise, and committed crimes angels have wept to see.

He was made of the sternest and the most enduring stuff that can enter into the composition of a human being. Nevertheless, he could but be regarded as full of contradictions. Hospitable yet mean, implacable yet generous, loyal yet rebellious, appreciative yet envious, cautious yet foolhardy, his temperament differed utterly from the poetic, passion-ridden, easily tempted, weakly-strong nature of the man who called him father.

Save a tendency to fall, there was no trace of likeness between them. Mr. Muir possessed one quality in common with the Devil. He might have been great in sin, but he could scarcely have scaled any height of virtue. In the way of crime, Gorman could, given occasion, have trod step for step with his father to a certain point. There he would have stopped, and, by remorse and self-abnegation, tried, unavailingly it might be, but still tried, to atone for his fault.

To the father repentance was an unknown quantity; to the son it proved a wind which always seemed beating him back from some point he wanted to make. The one was an enemy to fear, the other a friend to doubt. Hewson Muir had none of the storm-driven nature which made Gorman's life now all sunshine, again all shade; but he possessed an intense power of concentration and resistance to external influences, that rendered the coast of his mind wilder and more treacherous than that whereon the waves of anger and sorrow dashed, exhausting their energies for evil in showers of blinding spray.

“Nonsense!” said Mr. Muir, and the repression in his hard, cold voice formed a striking contrast to the tender softness and melting tone which rendered his son’s lightest utterance almost a declaration of love. “You’re talking a pack of rubbish. Here’s a girl—I don’t say she’s bad looking: she is far from that, but she’s nothing to make a song about—without a penny piece to her fortune, cast adrift by her father’s relations, made none too welcome by her mother’s side of the house, and you tell me she won’t listen to reason—that she’d rather be a governess than marry you. The idea is totally beyond the bounds of sense. You’ve been too eager, my lad. You’ve let her see her power; she’s trying you. As long as you follow, she’ll run. Just you stop, put your hands in your pockets, and shout ‘Good-bye! I’m tired of this,’ and she’ll come to you fast enough.”

“You are quite wrong about the matter,” returned Gorman vehemently. “Did not I tell her I would make a fool of myself no longer? And I might just as well have spoken to a stone.”

“Because you were not in earnest, and she knew it. She knew you couldn’t leave her, and that you did not mean to leave her.”

“But I did, I swear to you. If there ever were anything I intended more fully than another, it was either to go to ruin faster than I have yet tried to do, or marry a woman I dislike out of hand.”

“I wish to the Lord you had done the last,” interpolated Mr. Muir.

“I shall never do that now. Had I been able to bring myself to the state of mind in which a man marries a woman who is distasteful to him in every respect, except so far as utter honesty is concerned, your desire would have been fulfilled long since. As matters stand, what I shall do one day is this: I will go away, and never return. Had it not been for your kindness, father, during the months gone by, I should have gone ere this.” And Gorman, acting upon an impulse he was unable to check, stretched out his hand, which Mr. Muir took and held for a moment in an eloquent silence ere he answered,

“Before you are driven to that, we’ll make a try if we can’t get for you what you’ve set your mind on. The girl wouldn’t be my fancy, but if she’s yours there’s no call to talk more about the matter; you are putting as fine a chance as any man ever got behind your back, and you want to marry a beggar who is daughter to the craziest old woman in Ulster.”

“Yes, and if she were willing to marry me, I should not object to fifty mothers-in-law each crazier than Mrs. Boyle.”

“That’s all very well till you’ve got your wife,” answered Mr. Muir; “likely enough, after that, you’d think one too many.”

“Would to Heaven I were tried!”

“Well, well, I’ve had my say; only, Gorman, I’d have you bear one thing in mind: when a woman has money, if you get tired of her there’s satisfaction to be had out of her money, though there’s none out of herself; and—”

“Look here,” thundered Gorman, and he brought his clenched fist down on the table as he spoke, “if Berna Boyle were pitted with the

smallpox, if she were stricken blind, if she were deaf, dumb, lame, a beggar in the street, she would still be Berna to me, *the* woman of my life, the love of my soul, the only sweetheart I have ever really had."

"God only knows what you see about her," said Mr. Muir. "When I was young I wasn't, perhaps, over particular; but I always did like a girl with some sort of warmth; a girl who, if she was fond of you, would throw her arms round your neck and kiss you, or let you draw her blushing face close to your own till—"

Gorman stamped his foot. "I know the girls you mean," he said, "and, I have no doubt, to some men they might seem charming; but I would wait a year for my mistress' smile, and think myself well paid if at the end of that time she vouchsafed me one gracious word."

"You have waited nigh upon a year," remarked Mr. Muir; "and she hasn't, apparently, given you even that."

"No; and she never will," answered Gorman. "There's the trouble. If I had only hope, only

the ghost of a hope, I would serve for her as Jacob served for Rachel, and, were that possible, with a stouter heart."

"You'll never be like Jacob, I'm afraid, my man," retorted Mr. Muir. "Out of all the folk mentioned in Scripture he was, as well as I can gather, far and away the wisest. Only consider him when Laban wanted to get the better of the bargain in that matter of the sheep! What's that you're muttering? 'Plague take Laban and the sheep too!' Really, Gorman, I wonder at you, born and bred as you have been, in a Christian country, among Christian people!"

"Father," said Gorman, "hereafter, perhaps, in the long, lonely days to come, when I am a gray-headed, wifeless, childless, desolate man, I know I shall still say I would rather have loved Berna Boyle hopelessly, than married one of the Blood Royal and had the Crown Lands settled upon me into the bargain."

"You know best, of course."

"Yes, I think I do. Though I may never have even one sweet memory of fulfilment to look back

upon, I shall always remember my short love-dream as the happiest portion of a life which might have been made useful to God, man, and myself—which I should have made useful, but for the cruelty of a girl you despise.”

“That I despise ! For the Lord’s sake, Gorman, pay more heed to what you are saying. I don’t despise Miss Boyle, or even that foolish creature the mother, who pays for all she has with a most proper punctuality. They’re decent people, and have got good relations, but they *are* NOT RICH !”

“And if so, what then ?”

“Why, you might be rich, that’s all. You know as well as I do, though Mr. Garnsey bid you not make love to his daughter, he would give her to you to-morrow.”

“I know that, and I know why.”

“What’s the why ?”

“He wants a son-in-law who would make no inquiry about a sum of money which ought to have come to her under her grandfather’s will ; and, besides, if all I heard in Dublin is true, he

has a mind to have a person staying at Beechfield he could scarce ask his daughter to stop in the house with."

"I see—but all that makes no odds to you. He gave you to understand, Miss Garnsey would have five thousand pounds. Man! man! pause and consider; a face you've taken a fancy to may be very fine, but money's better. Think of all the diversion and satisfaction you might get out of a good income, and don't refuse the luck that's in a manner forced upon you, just because one girl's eyes are a trifle brighter than another's."

"If I cannot marry Miss Boyle, I shall die a bachelor," answered Gorman.

"Well, well, maybe that wouldn't be so bad a fate. 'After single a good wife's best,' you know. Where would you find a happier man than Mr. Cornelius Desmond? If you could give up this notion of that girl at Clear Stream, I would never speak to you again about Miss Garnsey."

"It is of no use; I cannot give up my notion, but I can go away."

"You sha'n't do that. I wish you had taken me into confidence long ago, but I hope it's not too late yet. The first thing you'll do, if you follow my advice, is get Mr. Vince on your side. He's no fool, and as far as I can gather he is none so fond of poor relations; he would, maybe, counsel Miss Boyle for her good."

"I do not want any one to counsel her. I would not take any wife who would only marry me because she was forced."

"Dear me, I am sure I can't tell which way to take you! Whatever you may think about Mr. Vince, though, I suppose you'll concede the mother ought to be told you want the daughter."

"I don't know who is to tell her. I won't."

"Somebody must; and I think Mr. or Mrs. Vince would be the best to break the news. I wouldn't wonder a bit if it was the thought of her mother's anger had something to do with the girl's refusal."

Gorman shook his head.

“ Will you leave it to me ?” went on his father.
“ Will you let me see what I can do among them all ?”

“ Yes ; I will leave it to you,” agreed the younger man, after a moment’s hesitation.

“ And will you try and behave yourself like a rational being : attend to your work, and keep steady, and give Clear Stream a wide berth till I tell you to go there ?”

“ Yes ; I think I can promise all that.”

“ You see, I understand from the old woman her daughter is determined to go out as governess, and that Mr. Vince won’t let his wife help her to get a place. He wasn’t best pleased to find the girl at Craigvallen at home among them when he came back from London—there’s nothing the widow doesn’t let out—and it’s very sure he’ll never have her there again. If we mind what we are about, I believe the next time you ask Berna Boyle she will say ‘ Yes ;’ but don’t be in too great a hurry to ask her. I think I can work the business if you will only have patience, though the Lord only knows what Bell will say when she

hears all that is going on. She'll be like a woman demented."

What Mr. Gorman Muir observed in reply need not be chronicled. His comment dealt with the great Bell question in a summary and exhaustive manner.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THERE probably never existed a man who entertained a higher opinion of his own abilities than Mr. Muir.

He held a firm belief that if in his youth he had been, what he called, "learned" Latin, Greek, Hebrew, modern languages, music, and painting, he would have made a figure in them all. A doubt as to his grasp of intellect never occurred to him. He was wont to point to what he had done, and argue from thence as to what he could have done.

Living in the narrowest of narrow circles, associating on intimate terms with no one beyond the members of his own household, his self-esteem rarely met with any check ; indeed, Bell was the only person who ever "took it upon her" to speak disparagingly concerning her father's "grip" of mind.

There is nothing safer than the assertion that it would be possible to move the world if we could find some place to stand while performing the operation.

Supposing, however, the place were found, matters might change their complexion ; and so in like manner, had Mr. Muir been taught all the wisdom of all the schools, it is more than probable some one would have discovered he did not possess better brains than his fellows.

Management he believed to be his strongest point ; from the pettiest detail of domestic economy to the government of kingdoms, Mr. Muir believed himself infallible. He knew houses where the " greatest of waste " was going on, and he was wont to hold forth for hours upon how differently he would manage, whether in the position of " Church or State minister." There were few things he liked so much as " putting things to rights " for other people, and it is consequently not wholly inconceivable that he regarded Gorman's infatuation with secret complacency, affording as it did an admirable opportunity for

putting his fingers into many pies, and extolling his own cleverness in extracting the fruit.

The first visit he paid was to Mr. Vince. On his way to Belfast he recited for the fiftieth time the many admirable remarks wherewith he proposed gaining over that gentleman to his side.

“He’ll be only too glad to come round to my way of thinking,” decided the farmer; having reached which satisfactory state of mind he found himself almost at the same moment standing on the step of Mr. Vince’s office.

The difficulties which beset obtaining an audience “damped” his courage somewhat. They cut two ways, causing him to feel Mr. Muir was a person of less importance than he had supposed, and Mr. Vince a greater. He walked across the outer office, expecting at once to be ushered into the private room, as when he called by appointment; and, instead, he found it necessary to give his name and almost pray for admission before the question of even asking him to wait could be entertained. It hurt his vanity sorely to find no one he saw remembered him, or cared about him,

or desired to be troubled with him. At least six persons asked him the nature of his business, and then the matter had to be referred to a "gray-headed old man," who "allowed" he might wait till Mr. Vince was disengaged, and then his message should be taken in.

Mr. Muir, whose hands were bare except for tan, was also greatly exercised in his mind by the fact that a young clerk could not run round to the Ulster Bank without first putting on his gloves.

"The whole lot of them," he said afterwards disparagingly, "were begun by Moses, and they'll be finished by Burgoyne;" which surnames referred to a well-known firm of tailors and an equally well-known individual who formerly kept a place of bodily entertainment in the passage running beside the Belfast News Room which connects Donegall and High Streets.

"It is just wonderful," considered poor Mr. Muir; "and to think this man is full cousin to that half-witted widow my son wants to get for mother-in-law!"

"Kindly step this way," said a supercilious

youth at this juncture; "Mr. Vince will see you."

If there were one place beyond another where Richard Charles looked more darkly, beautifully Presbyterian and respectable than another, it was in his office.

Predestination and election were writ large all over him. Nothing so light and frivolous as the Church seemed to have part or parcel in him. The cut of his clothes was founded on the Westminster Confession of Faith; the tie of his cravat and the solemnity of his shirt-front suggested the Shorter Catechism; whilst the gravity of his manners and the stern rigidity of his features could only have belonged to a man who knew the Longer off by heart, and had been "well grounded" in Chronicles first and second, and the books of the Kings of Israel.

All in vain Mr. Muir tried to assume an airy and easy manner. The atmosphere of Richard Charles's business sanctum proved too much for him. His remark, on being gravely asked to take a chair, that "sitting was as cheap as standing,"

produced simply no effect whatever. Mr. Vince might have been deaf so far as any response in tone, look, or manner indicated to the contrary.

“I was about to write to you, Mr. Muir,” said the great man, in that voice which usually proves its owner to be a loyal Orangeman, a staunch Dissenter, a foe to the Pope, and an enemy to all those unfortunates who belong “to the back parts of Ireland.”

“What about, sir?” asked Mr. Muir, for the time being, well-nigh cowed by the spectacle of Richard Charles seated in his well-padded office-chair, before a great “leather-covered table bigger than the billiard-table at my Lord’s,” with his plain heavy watch-chain, his stiff collar, and a face colder, harder, and more passionless than the farmer’s own. No human being except Marcella, daughter of Theophilus Carpenter, Esq., deceased, had ever seen that face relax, the lines of that severe countenance soften, and even to her he was not always as wax in the hands of the moulder.

There were times when she felt it better to “hold back” and let the rigid demon which

occasionally possessed her lord have the ground all to himself. She had not married for love, and she could afford to be wise; and yet there were times when, like Berna, she felt Craigvallen was not half sufficient purchase-money for the liberty and the possible future she had sacrificed when she said "Yes" to Richard Charles, and that marriage graphically described by Mrs. Boyle "came off."

"I was going to tell you," answered Mr. Vince, and his words had the same sort of power and weight that counting down sovereigns in the way of change produces on one who has been short, not merely of sovereigns, but of the smallest coin, "that after the first of next May I shall not hold myself responsible for the rent of Clear Stream Cottage."

Here was a collapse; but Mr. Muir rose to the occasion. As a tenant, Mr. Vince might be his superior—in money; yet, as a man, he was only his equal.

"I think," said the farmer, ignoring the word "know" simply from motives of politeness—and

his tone, as he spoke, was Presbyterian and cautious as Mr. Vince's own—"if I remember me right, that in consideration of the lowness of the rent, and the alterations I agreed to make, and did make, it was arranged between us that a year's notice ought to be the time; but I'll say nothing more; I won't hold you bound. Between friends it ought not to signify."

Mr. Vince regarded his visitor with a stony stare. Friends, indeed! The owner of Craig-vallen, a justice of the peace, the husband of Marcella, daughter of etcetera, a friend of a man who made his living out of land which he rented, cows whose milk was sold, hens that were sent to market—the suggestion was impossible! Could the fellow have been drinking? Mr. Vince had never taken even a quarter of a glass too much wine in his life, but he knew other persons were not so abstemious; nay, did not a dreadful old reprobate who had been a boon companion of his uncle's on one terrible occasion offer to "stand treat" to Richard Charles, at the same time advising that gentleman "not to be backward"?

Imagination is sometimes very deceitful. At that moment Mr. Vince felt satisfied there was a smell of whisky in the air.

"I conceived," he said, "the arrangement to which you refer was intended to continue only for the first year; but if you place a different construction upon the matter, I will say the first of November. All I desire is to settle a date when I shall feel definitely relieved from all connection with Mrs. Boyle's affairs."

"You must have done a heap for her," remarked Mr. Muir.

"I have; and I should have felt willing to do even more had she met me in a proper spirit. But I need not intrude my private affairs on you, Mr. Muir. Shall we say the first of November twelvemonth?"

"No, sir; when a gentleman deals fairly by me, I hope I know how to deal fairly by him. I won't hold you beyond the first of May in next year. And now we have come to an understanding on that point I will, with your leave, give you a hint of what I have come to see you about to-day."

“Pray do not hint, Mr. Muir. If there is any matter with which you think I ought to be made acquainted, you may speak out quite freely. Perfect straightforwardness has been the rule of my own life, and it is one I have found work well.”

“I don’t doubt it; any one that sees what you are can’t be off thinking you must have got on some good road to fame and fortune.”

Once again Mr. Vince looked hard at his visitor, whose manner he decided was not respectful. The root of the evil existed no doubt with Mrs. Boyle, and for the fiftieth time he determined to sever relations between that lady and himself.

“Perhaps you will be so good as to come to business, Mr. Muir,” he said. “I have an engagement, and—”

“Certainly, certainly,” agreed the farmer; but he got no further. He sat silent, considering how it would be best to open the pleadings.

“What you have to say bears reference to your present tenant possibly,” suggested Mr. Vince.

“Well, it does in a way. You see, I have a son—”

“Yes, and he—”

“Though I say it, he is as fine a young man as you’d meet in a day’s journey. He was brought up by his mother’s uncle, Mr. Trevasson, of Mount Michael, in the county Kilkenny, who gave him the best of educations, and would have made him his heir if it hadn’t been the old man took a notion to marry a young girl, which caused my son to get his marching orders.”

“Rather hard on your son. He is out of employment now, I suppose?”

“No; that is not it either. He has taken to a business that is paying him right well, and out of which he might make a first-rate living if he’d stick to it. But of late he has got a bit unsettled; he has taken the notion of falling in love with the wrong person.”

“I really am afraid, Mr. Muir, that is a matter in which it is not in my power to help you.”

“I think it is. I am telling my story poorly.

I wanted Gorman to come to you and tell it himself, but he wouldn't. He's terribly head-strong, though no better-hearted young fellow ever breathed. He might marry to-morrow the daughter of an estated gentleman, with five thousand pounds to her fortune, who belongs to a tip-top family; but he won't, for he has got the conceit he will have nobody in all the wide world but—Miss Boyle."

"Miss Boyle!" repeated Mr. Vince, genuinely surprised. "Do you mean Mrs. Boyle's daughter?"

"The very same. I can't but own it's a grief to me to see him flinging away his chances as a lad pelts pebbles into a river; still, I shall not try to cross his fancy."

"That is a matter, of course, for you to decide."

"I know that, and I have decided it; but there is a hitch. So far as I can gather, Miss Boyle thinks she is above my son—his superior."

"Perhaps she is. I have not seen your son, remember. I only suggest—"

"I understand. If you saw Gorman I am

sure you would deem him every bit as good as your cousin's child—maybe better."

Mr. Vince winced. It does not follow that because a man has climbed from a very low rung of life's lofty ladder he likes constantly to be reminded of the fact.

"Pray understand," he said, "that I mean no offence when I say Mr. Boyle was a man of very good birth."

"And Gorman's mother was a woman well born. There is no better family in Donegal than the Gormans of Clonmellin. She ran away with me. Katty Gorman, that was her name; Katty Gorman."

"But somehow Miss Boyle does not see it," said Mr. Vince, ignoring Katty altogether.

"That is the case in a nutshell. For all my son is what he is, she does not look upon him with the favour she might. Till they have tried it, most young women think they can marry anybody. People similar to you and me, Mr. Vince, who have seen life and got a good hold of what the world is like, know better. It is not every

man will take a girl without a penny piece in her hand; besides, there are other things against Miss Boyle; and though I may be willing to overlook, she ought to consider them. Therefore, what I thought was, if you would speak a few words to her, I'd take it very kind of you; very kind indeed. You might put the matter sensibly before her, and she would mind you. I know she would."

"I could not do such a thing, Mr. Muir; I could not really; and, to be quite plain, I would not if I could. I must utterly decline for the future to mix myself up in Mrs. Boyle's affairs. I have had so much unpleasantness and—and ingratitude already that I am determined to sever the connection. Miss Boyle is, I doubt not, a most well-conducted and deserving young lady; but one cannot dissociate a daughter from her mother. If you want advice or assistance you had better apply to Sir Herbert Boyle. He is as near a relation as I am. But whether you go to him or not, I really must beg of you not to come to me again about the matter. In justice to myself and my

family, I feel it only right to wash my hands of Mrs. Boyle ;” and Mr. Vince waved his hands, as if to intimate he was thankfully finishing a very extensive wash indeed.

“ Then there is no more to be said,” remarked Mr. Muir, rising.

“ There is no more to be said,” agreed Richard Charles, rising also.

“ And I’m very sorry I troubled you.”

“ Of course you could not know by intuition my sentiments on this unpleasant subject.”

“ If I had known you may be sure you wouldn’t have seen me here.”

“ Thank you, Mr. Muir ; that is precisely the observation I should have expected from a person of your excellent judgment.”

“ I’ll bid you good-morning now, sir,” said the man thus complimented ; and as he went he thought those individuals who spoke ill of Mr. Vince “ mightn’t be so far wrong.”

CHAPTER XIX.

WHATEVER faults friends or enemies might feel disposed to attribute to Mrs. Boyle, she scored, in common with many celebrated generals, in the fact that she had gained one great victory.

Let people say what they pleased about her, nor man nor woman could deny she had made, when close on thirty, a very fine match—an extraordinarily fine match. If things did not turn out “as she had a right to expect,” the fault was not hers. A warrior or a woman can only annex an important territory. Fate and circumstances may occur to render its annexation, comparatively speaking, valueless, but the splendour of the conquest remains.

Mrs. Boyle was faded and poor, but no one could deny she had been the lawful wife and was the widow of Ulick Boyle, of Boyle Court. She had done all she could, and (socially) it was

accounted unto her for righteousness. In the sight of many persons she was a woman much to be commended and admired. After her marriage, undoubtedly the stars, in their courses, fought against her, as they did against an even more unlucky individual, Sisera—but what of that? No blame could be attributed to Mrs. Boyle for a series of unfortunate accidents. The Boyle family might, for example, be considered wrong because they resolutely refused in any way to recognise Ulick Boyle's wife. Other mothers and fathers after a time forgave their sons if those sons married for love. Not so the Boyles. From the day of his wedding till the day of his father's death, poor Milly's husband never crossed the threshold of his paternal home. And that was twelve long years after he first met Milly, dressed in her pink dress ornamented with nine tucks, at the house of a dreadful Dublin usurer. Not "one farthing" did his father allow him during the whole of that time. What that stern parent wrote on hearing the news was—"I won't curse you, but you shall have no money I can keep you

out of, and probably you will find that curse enough."

It was trouble enough, but greater followed. The first child, a boy, who might have "put things right," was born dead. Those acquainted with the Ulick Boyle *ménage*, and probably few women knew more about that establishment than Ruth, declared the lack of a direct heir was attributable entirely to Mrs. Boyle's own folly.

"As a married wife," said Ruth, who with the best intentions was sometimes in the habit of mixing her forms of expression, "she was just beyond conceivability. She wouldn't take any sort of care of herself. She was here, there, and every place, tearing about like a mad woman. There would have been a living heir right enough, if it hadn't been for a picnic-party she would go to at the Dargle. We were living out at Clontarf then, and poor Mr. Boyle—O, he was the peaceable man—begged and prayed of her not to think of it. He wouldn't have been seen at such a gathering, for they were a rough, wild lot; and after the wedding he always kept himself quiet

and to himself, like a man broken-hearted. All the same she went, laughing and joking, and in the height of good spirits ; and before the day was out I was sent for, and there had come an end to all the master hoped might bring him and his father together again. Miss Berna was born two years after that ; and the way her mother went on about her being a girl was beyond belief."

However it may have happened, no baby boy appeared to heal the breach between father and son ; and for more than twelve years Ulick Boyle drifted on in poverty. His grandmother allowed him something, and the usurers a little. Occasionally he had a haul on the turf ; at other times he won a few pounds at billiards. Years passed, and his mother died ; a few more sped by, and his father departed also. Then came the glorious period of Boyle Court—at least the period which might have been glorious but for the debts Mr. Boyle had accumulated.

Loan after loan, bills renewed and renewed, interest and compound interest. Surely the divine Milly was entitled to no blame for these

many calamities ; on the contrary, who in her own rank of life could help commiserating the “deception” practised upon her ?

Instead of stepping into a clear seven thousand a year, Mr. Boyle was forced to set aside a large slice out of his rent-roll for the benefit of a certain number of importunate persons Mrs. Boyle termed collectively “a pack of hungry wolves.” Further, he had to effect heavy insurances on his life ; so once again, to quote Mrs. Boyle, “there was thousands going out before we could buy a loaf.” Originally the property had been mortgaged for a considerable amount, which no Boyle attempted to reduce. Ulick’s father might have done this. But if he ever even thought of sacrificing his own pleasure for the benefit of posterity, that ill-starred marriage with the enchanting Milly would have caused so sensible an idea to be abandoned.

Thus, one way and another, it came to pass that for years Mr. Boyle, of Boyle Court, was forced to live with the strictest economy, greatly to the vexation of his wife. As a child, Berna had been taken much notice of by her great-

grandmother, who paid for her education, and would eventually have adopted the girl altogether had she been content to give up home, father, and mother. It was, of course, only Mrs. Boyle to whom the Dowager objected; but, as she remarked with terrible plainness, "You cannot have home and father without your mother, and if you want your mother you must make up your mind to do without me." Berna made her choice, and Ulick Boyle, though almost mad with anxiety at the time, backed up his daughter's decision.

For two years previously he had not received one shilling of rent. For two years he had been forced to borrow money for his own expenses and to keep up his life policies.

That was the time when two million of Ireland's inhabitants died or emigrated. The starving people could not pay what they owed; and Mr. Boyle, like others, was forced not merely to ask the patience of his old creditors, but to contract fresh debts. Still, he did not despair. The famine could not last for ever. Rents, he argued, would be paid again some day. Further,

acting on the advice of a Scotch agriculturist, he began to rear sheep in large quantities, which he afterwards sent to fatten in the rich pastures of Munster.

And if there were wretchedness within doors, there was peace on the sea, on the hillsides, in the fastnesses of Mayo. Mrs. Boyle detested the sea, and, most happily, she could not ride. All the day long father and daughter were together, the unspoken trouble of the man's life drawing their souls more tenderly close. He had no fear concerning the girl's future. A few years more and he could so reduce his debts that the insurances effected for the benefit of his creditors would be available for his wife and child. Wildly extravagant in his earlier life, Mr. Boyle had long been so economical that his hope of eventually freeing his estate from all burdens except the original mortgage, and saving sufficient to portion his daughter, seemed by no means chimerical. But it was not to be. All in the fine spring weather, just when affairs, like the earth, were once more putting out shoots of

promise for him, the end came—to care, business, pleasure.

He was strong and well one moment; the next he was lying with the life almost crushed out of his body: Berna kneeling on the ground beside him; a lad running madly for Mrs. Boyle to see her husband while still breathing; and a man rushing distractedly in search of useless help.

It was the story of a moment—the final page of one volume to Berna. If the poor, bruised man, painfully gasping out his last breath on the short, sweet grass, were capable of thought, his worst agony must have been for the lonely girl he was leaving. For the creditors literally took everything. Nothing remained save the pittance mentioned by Mrs. Boyle. She might have obtained help; both Sir Herbert and the Dowager had every inclination to let bygones be bygones, and afford substantial assistance, but the widow demanded as a right what they were only willing to accord as a favour. She was a woman who would not be saved, except in her own fashion. To be rid of her the Boyles would gladly have

made her a sufficient allowance; but they found the only possible means of severing the undesirable connection was to let her return to the poverty from which she had emerged.

Mrs. Boyle's own friends, who heard only one side of the story, were, of course, almost unanimous in the condemnation of her husband's family. Even Mr. Vince, who certainly felt no sympathy with his cousin, declared Ulick Boyle's conduct had been most reprehensible. "A man's first care should always be the welfare of his wife and family," he remarked sententiously; which observation set Mrs. Vince thinking she was not sorry her own settlements had been drawn out very securely, and her future rendered as independent of any caprice on the part of Richard Charles as her father's lawyers could make it.

There was another point also concerning which Mrs. Boyle could count upon the commiseration of her girlhood's friends—Berna. That young person was an offence to the whole connection. Her voice, her manners, her accent, her appear-

ance, her silence, stank in the nostrils of all her mother's friends.

Had she been rich, they would not have liked her; being poor, they disliked her. A good bouncing, red-cheeked, forward girl, with "plenty to say for herself" and "lots of fun in her," would have received affection and sympathy; but "this bit of sickly affectation," who "thinks herself too high and mighty to associate with one of us," was canvassed most severely in the circles Mrs. Boyle delighted to frequent.

There was no one who failed to pity the widow for being burdened with a girl "without a spark of life in her;" and this pity was intensified when Mrs. Boyle began darkly to hint that Berna, which name, by the way, she pronounced Burrna, was the sole obstacle which prevented a second settlement in life, even more satisfactory than the first. Having convinced herself that Gorman Muir was her contemporary if not her senior, Mrs. Boyle naturally failed to make any allusion to the little matter of disparity which might have troubled a wiser woman. With the cunning

attaching to weak natures, she further refrained from all mention of who the HE might be who was dying for love of her.

“He is well-looking and well-connected, and brimming over with fun and spirits, which the Lord above knows Ulick Boyle never was, but Berna’s face grows as black as thunder when he comes inside the door. She’s as like her father as two peas. There never was one had a bit of merriment about him he could abide.”

When a lady’s friends form their ideal of a man “well-connected,” “well-looking,” “brimming over with fun and diversion,” from some spirit merchant who has “big stores” in Church Street, or a sea captain from Newtonards “that has made more by smuggling than any other honest man in the Three Kingdoms,” what is there to be said? Sweets to the sweet, sours to the sour, men to the women. Honestly, all Mrs. Boyle’s friends believed she had taken another male creature captive to her bow and spear. Why should they doubt the fact? Incredible though it might seem, she had once secured Ulick Boyle,

heir to Boyle Court and seven thousand a year. Given this at nine-and-twenty, why not at fifty a sea captain or a spirit merchant ?

Why not, indeed ?

Very freely the widow's prospects were canvassed among her connections ; and if some were envious at Mrs. Boyle's "luck," all felt admiration for her power of winning men and her strategy in keeping them.

"Let Milly alone," exclaimed Miss Sheill. "It's herself knows how to take the length of a man's foot. I was wanting her to join me in starting a lodging-house at Bangor ; but all the time she was doing better for herself than I could have done for her."

And, indeed, Miss Sheill might be forgiven for falling into such a delusion. Mrs. Boyle had not merely discoursed at length to her friend concerning the match she was about to make, but actually hazarded a proposal that Matilda should share her prospective home.

"He'll never sit down content in one place year in, year out," she declared with sportive

vivacity. "As it is, he is always starting off some place like a flash of lightning, and you may be sure he'd not care to leave me very far behind. I never saw a bit of life all the while I was married to Ulick Boyle. But it's a long lane has no turning, and I'll be having fine times yet. And so, as I was saying, if you like to come and live with us, and look after things while we're away, you'd be more than welcome. You never need black your hands, for we'll have servants in plenty. All you'd have to do would be keep an eye on them, for you know what they are, one and all; and you could put by the whole of your own small income, and then, if you saw anybody you thought you'd like, I'd be the first to say 'Leave us.' There's no selfishness about me."

With such prospects in store, Mrs. Boyle naturally forgot the compact entered into with Richard Charles. She went often to Belfast. She was to be seen of all men, flitting about the busiest streets of that thriving town. She had "eased her mourning," and quite decided the next new dress she bought should "at least have a

lilac stripe in it." Trying though she had been as a young woman, she was more trying still as a widow. The world had gone on; manners had improved; but Mrs. Boyle had not gone on, and her manners had grown worse. Mr. Vince cut his cousin dead in Donegall Place, and Mrs. Vince refused to see her even though they met face to face in Gardiner's, where Mrs. Boyle and Miss Sheill were refreshing themselves with currant buns. Berna resolutely declined to accompany her mother on any of these campaigns. She had quite made up her mind to leave home, even if she could at first get no salary, as a companion.

Mrs. Vince was inquiring for something likely to suit the girl, and Berna had written to the lady by whom she was educated to know if she could assist her design. This letter was returned to her, however, with the word "Dead" across the envelope. This word formed a text upon which Mrs. Boyle preached many sermons, the burden of all being,

"You see now what it is to be an undutiful child, setting yourself up against a mother that

has sacrificed her life for you. It is a judgment upon you. Strangers are not so ready to have you. What you'd best do is try to conquer your sinful temper, and make yourself pleasant to a man that's willing to find a good home for me. I might have been married and happy long ago, if you had only behaved yourself."

"Well, mamma, I will not stand in your way one moment after I hear of a situation—*any* situation," said Berna passionately, breaking the silence she usually maintained. "I would rather be a servant, polish grates and scrub floors, than continue to lead the life I have led since we came here."

"Ah, you'll find out the difference, maybe, when it is too late," returned Mrs. Boyle, "when you have no home and no mother either!"

CHAPTER XX.

MATTERS had arrived at this pass when Mr. Muir, scarcely giving himself time to recover from the smart of disappointment inflicted by Mr. Vince, dressed in his ordinary clothes, in which he felt he had "room to speak," and taking his courage in his hand, walked down to Clear Stream Cottage to say what he had to say to mother or daughter, or both. He rather wished to see both. He felt it might be "just a shade easier to talk to two women than one;" but nerving himself for either event, and with a strong conviction he should gain the day, he paced along the lane—now ankle-deep in dust, as it had once been pretty nearly knee-deep in mud—pondering, as he went, on the cross-cornerness of things in general, and of his children in particular.

Not one of them was "just to his mind" but Gorman, and Gorman wanted to throw himself

away on a girl without a halfpenny, whose mother was a "flighty fool," when he had but to "ask and have" Lyle Garnsey's daughter, with "a big fortune and all the best houses open to her."

That the best houses would not open to Berna Boyle he felt too surely.

"With Miss Garnsey for his partner, a man of his knowledge and appearance might have visited both the Earl and the Marquis," he soliloquised, "and just played himself among the gentry. However, it is the Lord's will, and I must submit. I thought myself a made man when I let the cottage, never taking a notion about the trouble would come of it. Faith, Bell was right when she said we might hear too much concerning the cottage one day. Now, I wonder how she jumped at that?"

Mrs. Boyle had taken an early stroll into the village, so Berna was alone when Ruth ushered Mr. Muir into the little parlour. Drawing materials lay upon the table. During her mother's absence the girl had been trying to fill in a sketch of the Lough and the county Antrim shore.

Instinctively, when Mr. Muir was announced, she threw a sheet of tissue paper over the cardboard.

Never did she feel in a less congenial frame of mind for listening to those compliments of which the farmer was so fatally lavish. Their earliest acquaintance had been inaugurated with some flattering comments that Berna knew she could never forget, even though she might forgive.

On the present occasion, however, nothing was further from Mr. Muir's mind than mere civility. He had come with a purpose to Berna, as he might have gone to a man; and he was steadfastly determined no undue time should be lost over preliminary courtesies.

Still, some commonplace phrases were essential, and the natural politeness of his nation supplied him with words.

"I hope I see you better, Miss Boyle?" he began.

"Thank you," she said; and in the light of a future daughter-in-law, her slight young figure, well-poised head, clean-cut features, and high-

bred manner seemed good to this man who had risen from the people. "I am very much better—almost well again."

"You found the change to the shore did you good?"

"Yes, indeed. I shall believe in sea air again."

"Yet you are not far from it here. I mind well that Miss Garnsey's aunt, in the old man's time, used to drive over every day of her life and every month in the year, except December and January, to Hollywood for the benefit of the salt-water bathing."

"Really! Bathing in the winter months must be extremely cold."

"Not it. The sea is always warmer in the winter than in the summer."

"How very strange! I am so sorry that mamma is not at home."

"I don't know that that makes much odds. It was with you I wanted a few minutes' discourse."

"With me, Mr. Muir?"

“Yes; you can guess what about. My son—”

“About Mr. Gorman?”

“About Gorman; no other. It’s no news to you, I suppose, he is fairly breaking his heart over you?”

Berna sat silent for a moment, looking at Mr. Muir with an expression of absolute fear; then she remarked slowly,

“I should have thought anything your son had to say he could have said to me.”

Mr. Muir laughed—a harsh, short, bitter laugh.

“Make no mistake about that. Gorman’s not the sort to make love at secondhand; and if he were, I’m not exactly the one he’d choose to make it. What I want to understand is this: he has asked you to marry him, as far as I can understand, some half-dozen times?”

“He has asked me to marry him.”

“And more than once?”

She inclined her head.

“It’s a thing I wouldn’t do myself. No; no

for the best woman ever stepped on shoe-leather," said Mr. Muir, in a tone which clearly implied he did not consider Berna that woman. "If one I had a notion of, didn't like to take me, she might do the other thing. However, every one to his taste."

There was no reason why Berna should dissent from this statement, and accordingly she held her peace.

"When my son came home," went on Mr. Muir, with his right forefinger beating time to his words on the back of his left hand, "and settled on taking the hill farm, and buckled to work, and turned himself to getting money together, I thought myself a made man. I had little fear but that after a while he would marry Miss Garnsey, and that I would see both their names in the newspapers among the quality gathered at the great parties the Earl and the Marquis give when they come across from England. I did not know what was going on here. It was a notion never occurred to me he had taken a fancy of you. He was as quiet about the

whole thing as a mouse in a meal-chest. Even Bell—that's my eldest daughter—never suspected it was you were keeping him pleasant and content. When the matter was first broached to me, I declare anybody might have knocked me down with a feather, I was so dumfounded. I don't know what call there was to keep the whole thing so close."

"You may be very certain," said Berna, "it was not a subject I should have mentioned."

"And why not?" asked the farmer, aggrieved. "Most of you are glad enough to say you have got a lover, even if he's old and ugly, let alone a proper man like my son—a man any lady in the land might feel proud to be seen with."

"*I* should not have mentioned it," repeated Berna.

"You are a very out-of-the-way sort of young woman," retorted Mr. Muir; "but I don't know that I ought to quarrel with you for being able to hold your tongue—it is a thing not many among you can do."

Once again Berna did not answer. If there

had ever been any hope before for Gorman, his father must have killed it.

“What I want to come at is this,” he said. “Why do you treat my son as you are treating him? why, if you can’t make up your mind to say ‘yes’ all at once, won’t you give him now and then a kind word or a pleasant look?”

“I wish, Mr. Muir, you would not ask me these questions. I wish you had not thought it necessary to speak to me at all. I have tried to make your son understand that I cannot marry him, and I do not think any one else has a right to talk to me about the matter.”

“You’re wrong there. If a father sees his son going to the bad, he has a clear right to try and stop him. If he sees him brooding and wretched and miserable because a girl says she’ll have nothing to do with him, he would not be much of a parent if he didn’t try and put things on a proper footing between them. Now, would he?”

“Perhaps not. Only in this case—”

“You mean it is of no use trying to put things square. That may be so; but I intend

to strive my hardest. It's not my wish to flatter you, but I must say I consider you have sense beyond the common; and that is the reason I want to have a quiet talk with you."

"But, Mr. Muir, I have told your son I cannot marry him. Surely you can understand how painful it must be for me to repeat the same thing to you."

"It is not pleasant for me to hear; because, as I tell you, Gorman's heart is set on getting you. There is no use beating about the bush. If I could have chosen for him, you are not the wife I would have picked. I don't intend any offence by speaking out plainly; but I know he could have done better. I'm sure it's through no goodwill of mine he hasn't;" and, looking straight in Berna's face as he said this, Mr. Muir paused for her reply.

The girl did not reply. A swift wave of colour swept over her face and then ebbed away, leaving her even paler than before; but she remained silent. She opened her lips to answer, but no sound issued from them.

“I wonder you don’t say you would be glad to see him well married,” remarked Mr. Muir. “If you do not want him yourself, you need not begrudge him to another.”

“Your son is, of course, at liberty to marry any one he pleases.”

“We know that. He has no need to ask your leave. But he won’t marry any one but you; and I should not care so much about his stopping single if it wasn’t I am afraid he’ll never do a day’s good wanting you. So what I wish to get at is why you won’t take him. Where would you meet another like Gorman, straight and handsome and clever? There is not one, poor or rich, but likes him. Why can’t you, Miss Boyle? Only tell me what he can do to please you, and he’ll do his possible, I know.”

“It is not that,” answered the girl slowly. “I have no fault to find with your son. He is handsome and accomplished, but—”

“You can’t fancy him?”

“I cannot marry him.”

"Am I to understand you cannot marry him though you fancy him?"

"I did not say that, Mr. Muir."

"Then what did you say? or rather what do you mean? Why can't you marry him?"

"I was wrong in saying cannot; what I meant was that I will not."

"You will not?"

"I will never marry him."

"At least you can tell me why."

"No, I cannot."

"Well, this beats everything! If you have any reason, why won't you say what it is?"

"We do not always choose to give our reasons."

"I think a woman is bound to give a man some reason why she'll have nothing to do with him. It may seem a light matter to you for my son to offer you all he has—his hand and his heart, his love, his whole future; but it is serious, whatever you may consider. We have none of us got more than one life, and it is just his Gorman is willing to put in your charge.

No man can bestow on a girl he is fond of more than he has ; and when he does propose to bestow his all, I repeat she should give him some good reason why she refuses what he wants her to take, and not fling it back in his face as if it was beneath her to touch."

"I never treated your son's offer in that way."

"You are doing something very like it now, at any rate. 'You cannot marry him.' 'You will not marry him.' Not another word but that am I able to get out of you. That is no answer to give a man ; say what is standing between you. Are you fond of anybody else ?"

"No."

"Are you under any promise to another man ?"

"No."

"Do you suppose your mother wouldn't let you marry him ?"

"I have not thought about it."

"Do you think he is not good enough for you ?"

She did not answer "Yes," or "No." She

only remained like one compelled against her will to look at Mr. Muir, while he in his turn searched her face with keen eager eyes.

“Ho, ho!” he said; “that’s the way of it, is it? The wind sets in that quarter, does it? Now only answer me one more question, and I’ve done. Have you no liking for Gorman at all? Don’t be afraid of speaking out to me. I’ll make no bad use of anything you tell me.”

“I have nothing to tell,” she replied.

“Yes, you have,” he retorted; “and I have a right to hear. Have you a hatred against my son? No, don’t go. I would be sorry to put any constraint on you; but I am purposed to keep you here till I get some sort of answer. I’ll put it another way—are you fond of my son?”

“Please to let me go, Mr. Muir. You are hurting me.”

“I am sorry for that,” he answered; “but I don’t mean you to leave this room till I get some sort of satisfaction. I came here meaning to thresh the matter out; and now I am getting at the corn, I intend to finish the job. You won’t

“speak, won’t you? Well, I will speak for both of us. You *do* care for my son; you couldn’t look straight at me and say you are not in love with him?”

“You really are hurting me. *Will* you take your hand from my arm, Mr. Muir?”

“I’ll do that; I have no need to hold it any longer. But before you go, I’d like well if you would say why you consider Gorman’s not good enough for you—in what way you think yourself above him? You needn’t be frightened, I am not going to touch you again; I am only intending to stand with my back against this door till I come at the rights of your notion. He is as well-looking, to say the least, as you are; he has more money than you own; you have had no better education than he has; the house where his uncle reared him was as good as Boyle Court, every bit; if he has a farmer for his father, your mother was only Miss Vince, the daughter of old Sam Vince, whose dirty tricks were the talk of Belfast, and—”

“What can be wrong with the catch?” Mrs.

Boyle, at this critical moment, was heard exclaiming. "Berna, open! open! What are you doing? Why, Mr. Muir, and is it yourself? I am heartily glad to see you. I did not know you were behind the door. I thought Berna had locked herself in for a bit of fun. What in the world ails the girl? What's wrong with her, Mr. Muir?"

"I am sure I don't know," answered the gentleman thus appealed to. "I came over this morning to have a talk with her about my son, and perhaps she isn't best pleased with what I have said."

"She needed somebody to talk to her," said Mrs. Boyle. "I am sure I have spoken till I am tired. The way she behaves herself is scarce to be believed. It's no wonder Mr. Gorman has quit coming to the house, seeing the black looks he got whenever he showed his face—"

"Mamma!"

"O! you'll not stop me, now I have begun. I am very glad, Mr. Muir, you have been giving her a talking to. It's out of the question, a friend can't call without being affronted."

"Then I may tell Gorman you have no objection to seeing him, Mrs. Boyle?"

"Objection! quite the contrary. He might know that."

"And perhaps you'd favour the marriage?"

"O Mr. Muir! what marriage?" asked the widow, with modest innocence.

"Why, your daughter's. Gorman will never be happy till he has come with her from church."

"You are not in earnest?"

"I only wish I was not," declared Mr. Muir. "I wish from my soul I was not. She has cast some spell over him. It's like witchcraft, neither more nor less."

For once Mrs. Boyle could not answer. She had dropped on the sofa, and sat staring at Gorman's father, looking like a card castle that has been suddenly demolished.

Had any one else told her this awful thing she would have laughed him to scorn; but there was that in Mr. Muir's face and Mr. Muir's manner which carried conviction with his words. Berna was a child no longer. She stood there

a girl grown to woman's estate—her mother's rival. Gorman loved her. It was Ulick Boyle's daughter, not Ulick Boyle's widow, he wanted to marry. This was what had brought him to the house. Mrs. Boyle had never read Shakespeare, or she might have remembered several passages peculiarly applicable to her own position.

“Don't come near me!” she screamed, as Berna made a movement to advance to where she sat. “You're wicked enough already; don't add hypocrisy to your other sins!”

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